

THE
NECESSITY
OF
Serious Consideration,
AND
SPEEDY REPENTANCE,
As the only
WAY to be SAFE
BOTH
LIVING and DYING.

By CLEMENT ELIS, Rector of
Kirkby in Nottinghamshire.

Psalm 119. 59, 60. *I thought on my ways, and
turned my feet unto thy testimonies.
I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy command-
ments.*

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T O M Y

C H I L D R E N .

My dear Children,

THIS Plain Discourse of The Necessity of **SERIOUS CONSIDERATION** and **SPEEDY REPENTANCE**, seem to me very needful to many, and is therefore published, that all who need it, and please to make use of it, may have by them a friendly Remembrancer to put them in mind to take all due care of themselves: Yet because of the Special Love and Care I ought to have for you, as I am your Father, I do in a more special manner commend it to you, as the very best Advice I am able to give you; and seeing my life cannot now be much longer, it may be the last.

If I have expected from you the Duty of Obedient Children, it hath been always more for your sakes than mine own; that you might be sharers in that special Promise which St. Paul tells you belongs to them that Honour their Father and Mother, Ephes. 6. 2, 3. And I shall always reckon, that you very fully pay all that Honour which you owe to me, so long as I see you make it your chief business to fear God, and keep his

To my Children.

Commandments, which is your whole Duty, Eccl. 12. 13. Honour always your Father which is in Heaven; and be sure you can do no greater Honour than that to your Parents upon Earth. And as you may justly expect from me the Love and Care of a Father; so you ought to think that I never better express either of them towards you, than when, as the same St. Paul hath commanded me, I endeavour to bring you up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, v. 4. For whatever else God shall enable me to do for you, in this I take care at once both of your Souls and Bodies; Godliness having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come, 1 Tim 4 8.

I dare not be confident, that I have not much fail'd you in this Duty of a Father, whilst you were all at home with me, and under my eye. Neither can I now hope to have you again much with me whilst I live, or indeed that I shall live much longer to take any care at all of you. The only way therefore that is now left me, either to make you amends for such neglects of you, as I may have been at any time guilty of; or to testify my earnest desire, that you may be always happy in the Service, and under the Blessing of Almighty God, the FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, to whom you were in your Baptism dedicated; is first, daily so long as I live, to pray for his Grace to guide and govern you in the ways of Truth and Holiness to Eternal Life; and then to put into your hands the substance of all those pious Instructions

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To my Children.

Instructions which I could ever be able to give you, were we to live here together to the World's end.

This, if I mistake not, I have already in some good measure done in three small Books, viz. CHRISTIANITY in SHORT; the SCRIPTURE-CATECHISM, and the COMMUNICANT'S GUIDE. If you be perfect in these, you will understand reasonably well both what you are to believe, do, desire, and hope for; and will be able to reap more benefit by the reading of other more excellent Books, and chiefly that Book of Books, the BOOK of GOD, which I do charge you with all the Authority of a Father, to read so long as you live, when not unavoidably hinder'd (some part of it daily); and that with the greatest seriousness and attention of mind, with the devoutest Reverence to the Great GOD, whose Word it is, and with most earnest Prayers to Him, to enlighten your understandings by it, and to conform your Wills wholly unto it,

Consider well all that you read or hear, and speedily put in practise all that is your Duty to do, and cast off every Sin without delay; as this Discourse will, I hope, convince you it is altogether necessary for you to do. Having therein said so much to you and others jointly, I shall not need to say much more now to you alone. Only let me advise you to bear this always in remembrance, That if you will be saved, it must be by obeying the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST, our

To my Children.

only Saviour, *which you cannot do, but by denying your selves, by doing his will and not your own; following his Rules, and not the Customs and Fashions of the Persons, great or small, amongst whom you live.* Our Wills are corrupt and perverse, and the Multitude is always in the Broad way to Destruction. You have need of much Christian courage to save your selves from this untoward Generation. O, as you love God and your selves, be neither ashamed nor afraid to live as the few do, which are in the narrow way to Life. Stoutly resolve to be as indifferent for the World, as you see many zealous for it; and as zealous for God and Heaven, as you see others regardless of them. Pray fervently for strength to do as you resolve; and then I doubt not, but you will be a comfort to me whilst I live, and an Honour to me when I am dead; and when you are dead too, we shall all live together again in the Eternal Joys of Heaven, through **JESUS CHRIST** our Lord. Amen.

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THE
NECESSITY
OF
Serious Consideration.

THE INTRODUCTION.

THAT Exhortation which St. Peter hath given unto Christians, 2 Pet. i. 10. *To give diligence to make their calling and election sure*; must needs appear at the very first hearing of it, so very reasonable, and so much for our Advantage every way, that one would think it should be most readily embraced, and immediately put in practice by every one that loves himself. Can any one, who hath any love for himself (as who hath not in some sense or other?) rest himself content and well satisfied, so long as he apprehends himself to be in an *unsafe* and dangerous Condition, and knows a way how to come out of it? Is it not natural to all Men in

such a Case to bestir themselves, and to seek out diligently all the means of *safety*, and never to cease from so doing, till they think themselves as sure as Men can be, that all the danger is over; and that they need no longer to *fear*, either to lose the *good* they *love*, or to suffer the *Evil* they *abhor*? Yes, it is natural enough to us all, to use as much, and oftentimes a great deal more diligence, than it is either *needful* or *fit* for us to use, that we may secure the safety of our *Bodies*, and even of the least valuable parts of our *Estates* in this World; which yet it is not in our power to do, tho we do all that ever we can to that purpose. But alas! we are so far from using any such diligence in endeavouring to make sure to our selves our *Eternal Happiness*, (tho we may be always as sure, that we shall have power to do this, as we are that we sincerely endeavour it) that we hardly once consider, that we are in any danger of losing it.

Surely it will be granted by all, That a *blessed Life* for ever in *Heaven*, after this very *short* and very *troublesome* Life on *Earth* shall be at an end, is a very desirable thing; and such as one cannot but desire, when he hath well consider'd, That *there* it may be had, but *here* it cannot. And tho' there may be some, who do not yet believe, that such a life of *eternal Blessedness* is to be had in Heaven after Death; yet I dare say, that even these, seeing they know they must shortly die, could heartily wish it might

The Introduction.

might be so. I cannot easily be persuaded to think, that any one can hate *Life* for any thing else but the *troubles* and the *miseries* which he finds it cannot be without: And therefore I believe, that no Man would willingly *die*, and be no more for ever, supposing it possible that he may *live again* for ever without any such *troubles* or *miseries*. Now every one knows, that he must die, and that it cannot be long ere he must live no more here; and therefore no Man can chuse but wish, that, if it be possible, he may live again: Especially if he may be sure, both to live a happy life, and to die no more.

And blessed for ever be our Lord JESUS CHRIST, who hath given us assurance, that there is such a Life prepared for all that are his faithful followers! *He hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel, 2 Tim. I. 10.* And being *Himself the way, the truth, and the life, Joh. XIV. 6.* hath pointed out unto us *the narrow way which leadeth unto life, Mat. VII. 14.* And this is no other but the way of God's Commandments, *Rev. XXII. 14. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life.* Whosoever therefore desires an *eternal blessed Life after Death*, and has a mind to make it *sure* unto himself, must make *haste* to get into this way, and be very careful to keep it so long as he lives. He must get into this way, because there is no other way to Life;
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and he must make haste to get into it, because Death follows him every day at his Heels, and he knows not how soon it will be upon him; and if he get not into the way of Life before it overtakes him, he must die and be miserable for ever. And he must be sure to keep it all the days of his present Life, because whenever he goes out of it, he is in the way to eternal Death.

The time of this *present Life* (how short soever it may be) is to be look'd upon as the *only time* of making an *eternal Life* sure unto us. If we let this *time* pass over us before we are prepared for that *Eternity*, it is like to prove unto us an *Eternity* of Sorrows. Now are we travelling toward God our *Happiness*, and those heavenly *Mansions*, which the *Eternal Son of God*, and our *only Saviour*, is gone before to prepare for us; and where we hope to be for ever with the Lord. Whilst we *live*, we are but in the way, and not at home in our Country: *Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come*, Heb. XIII. 14. And the same blessed JESUS, who hath open'd the Gate of Life unto us by his own *Death* and *Resurrection*, and is our only sure *Guide* unto it, hath acquainted us with two ways, and no more, that we can walk in whilst here we live; the *broad way* to *Destruction*, wherein go the *Multitude*; and the *narrow way* to *Life*, wherein but few walk: If then we step out of the *one way*, we must needs be in the *other*; for
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there is no *middle Path* to be found, wherein we may walk, and neither go to *Life* nor *Destruction*. The *broad way* is that of *Men's Lusts*, wherein there is *Latitude* enough; and the *narrow way* is the way of *God's Commandments*; and a Man must be very *strict* and *upright* in his walking therein, and must not swerve either to the *Right-hand* or to the *Left*, if he have a mind to be safe.

It seems (I must needs say) one of the strangest things in the World to me, that we all should be so exceedingly concern'd, as at every turn we shew our selves to be, about our living *safely* and *comfortably* in this *present* World, so that we cannot hear the least ill news, but it puts us quite out of humour; and we are all in fears what will become of us: And yet so very few amongst us seem to have any concernment at all upon them, what shall become of them when they *die*! I confess, if Men could be any way assured, that there is nothing at all to be expected after Death, I should the less wonder, that their whole concern should be for this Life; because I know nothing else that they should be concern'd for. But seeing it is an impossible thing, that any one should be assured of that; and seeing we have all the assurance that Men can have of the contrary, *to wit*, That an endless state of either *Happiness* or *Misery* shall follow our short life here, what an unaccountable madness seems this to be, which has so generally possess'd

sefs'd us, to be so concern'd, how we shall fare for a few Days here, and altogether as regardless (for so the most of us seem to be) how it shall go with us for evermore! Whence can this proceed, but from *inconsideration*, or want of *thinking* on things as Men should do? If we did really think in earnest, *what we are, whence we came, what we have here to do, how soon we may and must go hence; whither we are to go, and what shall finally become of us*; we must needs become a little more *serious* and *provident* both; than now we are; and how little *assurance* soever we had of what is to come, we would be concern'd a little, so to behave our selves in this World, as we might go out of it with this Comfort at least, That if we can be *sure* of no good after Death, yet we should not need to *fear* any evil. Any one that is wise, if he have no hopes to be *Happy*, would yet take a course to be *Safe*. And yet (God knows!) the generality of People are far short of this Wisdom. All we seem to mind, is some little thing that we take pleasure in for the present; and all our care is, not to lose that, whatever it be, so long as we live. But we so little think of what either *shall* be, or *may* be after Death, yea, and (what's stranger, considering we know it so well) we so little think, that we are every moment stepping towards the Grave, and that the next step we take, for ought we know, may be into it; that Death *surpriseth* most of us, when ever it comes; and how
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slowly soever, through God's wonderful *forbearance*, it come; yet it steals upon us *unaware*, and takes us *unprepared*, and so proves (what we are well-taught to pray against) a *sudden Death* to most of us; and if there be any thing worse than another after Death (as certainly there is both a *better* and a *worse* than any thing can be in this World) we are sure of it. To make us a little more sensible of this great *folly*, and to shew us what course we are to take, if we have any mind to do our selves good, or have no mind to make our selves miserable for ever, is the design of this Discourse. And I shall divide it into Two *Parts*. In the former of which I shall shew the Necessity of a *Serious Consideration*, and give some few Directions for it. In the later shall be shewn the Danger of *Delaying our Repentance*, and an Exhortation given to make haste to live well, that we may be always ready to die well; and so make sure of Life Eternal.

PART I.

OF CONSIDERATION.

HE that would make sure of eternal Life, and escape everlasting Torments, must take care to do it in this World, before he be call'd out of it by Death: For the time of this present Life is the only time which God hath given us to prepare our selves for Eternity; and as we behave our selves now, so must we expect to fare for ever. And the best course that we can be directed to take, that we may be sure of Eternal Blessedness, is the same which *David* tells us he took, *Psalms CXIX. 59, 60.* in these words: *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies: I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* Where we are to observe both what he did, and what he did not.

I. That which he did was this: *First, He thought on his ways.* He enter'd into a *Serious Consideration* of his own course of life, that he might understand thereby, what his present State

State and Condition was ; and whether such a Life was agreeable to the Law of God or no ; and consequently, whether it would bring him to Happiness or Misery. And, *Secondly*, Having considered this well, *He turned his feet unto God's Testimonies* ; and *he made haste to keep his Commandments*. Whatsoever he found amiss in himself, he immediately corrected it by a speedy *Repentance*, regulating his whole Conversation henceforward by the right Rule thereof, *the Commandments of God*.

2. That which he did not, was this: *He delayed not to keep God's Commandments*. Or, as some render it, he was not troubled, or disturb'd in mind about it ; or he had no dispute within himself, Whether he should do it just now, or stay till some other time ; but without any delay, or driving it off from day to day, or so much as one moment longer, he presently set himself to the keeping of God's Commandments. He did not, as *Felix* did, *Acts XXIV. 25.* who when he had heard *St. Paul reasoning of Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment to come*, was so far concern'd, as that he fell a trembling ; but yet put off the farther consideration of what he had then heard, to a more convenient time : *Go thy way, saith he, for this time ; when I have a more convenient season, I will call for thee*. A season which, as far as we know, he never found. *David* was wiser for himself than so : He had not only consider'd his ways, but also the uncertainty of his life. He knew that he had

had not time at his command, he could not make it stay his leisure; therefore he took it whilst it was there; considering withal, that the time present is always the most convenient season for doing that, which if it be not done before he die, he must perish everlastingly.

We have these two things then in this good Example to imitate, 1. His *Consideration*. 2. His *Reformation*. The latter of these is the sure way to God and Blessedness; but we are never like to come into it, but by the former. And therefore I shall commend this, in the first place, to all that have a desire to be safe. Concerning *Consideration*, I shall shew, 1. What it is. 2. What are the Evils of Inconsideration. 3. What chiefly causeth the neglect of it. 4. What are the things we should consider.

S E C T. I.

What Consideration is.

Designing this Discourse principally for the less-understanding sort of People, I find it necessary, in the first place, to tell them, what is meant by *Consideration*. And, I suppose, such Persons will best understand me, when I say, That to *consider* a thing, is very *seriously* to *think* of it. I say, it is to *think* of it very *seriously*, as much as the thing deserves to be thought of. To understand
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this more perfectly, let us enquire into two things.

1. What kind of things they are which deserve our serious thinking on.
2. What kind of thinking it is that deserves the name of *Consideration*.

i. What kind of things they are which deserve our serious thinking on. It is not every thing that deserves to have a Man's serious Thoughts, or which can be thought worthy of his Care, and fit for him to busie his Head much about. But the things which a Man should seriously think upon, are such things as we are wont to call *considerable things*; matters of some weight, and of some concernment to him one way or other; and especially such as are of greatest concernment. They should be such as it may do one some good to think on; and the serious thinking of which, may make him the *Wiser*, the *Better*, or the *Happier*. There are some things of so little worth or concernment to us, that they are not *worth* much thinking on; and there are some things so unintelligible to us, that it is to no *purpose* to think much of them; and there are some things that are so wholly above our power of ordering, that it can no way avail us to be much concern'd in our Thoughts about them. But there are, besides these, things, whereof if we do not think much, we must needs be *Fools*, or *Wicked*, or *Miserable*; and these ought to be much and seriously thought on. Yet such is the vanity of

our Minds, that we are aptest to trouble our Heads most about those things, the much thinking whereof brings us nothing but trouble and vexation. How happy were it for us, if we could never think of many of those things which our Thoughts do usually run most upon! And in thinking whereof we waste the far greater part of our Life, either to little, or to a bad purpose! It would be our great ease, and advantage too, to think no more on these things, than only to consider that they deserve not, and therefore should not have our serious Thoughts.

As any thing is of more or less *use* and *concernment* to us; as it may more or less conduce to make us *Wise*, or *Good*, or *Happy*; as the thoughts of it may more or less help us to live as we ought to do, in our *duty* to *God* or *Man* in this life, or to come to *Eternal Life* when we go out of this; so it is more or less to be seriously thought on. And in like manner, whatever things may make us *worse* or more *miserable*, and may be *hindrances* and *obstructors* either of our *duty* or *happiness*, are accordingly to the hurt more or less which they may do us, to be more or less made the Objects of our serious Thoughts: So that whatever things they be, that may not be either *useful* or *hurtful* to us, and the more or less so, as we either do, or do not think upon them, are to be look'd on as things not at all *considerable*; and therefore no more to be thought on, than must needs

needs be; when they come into our Heads whether we will or no; and then are they to be thought on with all *indifferency* imaginable.

The things then that are of *concernment* to us, and for that *considerable*, are all such as we may be *better* or *worse* for, such as God may be *honour'd* or *dishonour'd* by; such as may *help* or *hinder* us to be good, and to do good in this World; or may *prepare* or *unfit* us for everlasting *Blessedness*. Hence the concerns of the *Soul* are more to be thought on than the concerns of the *Body*; *Publick* concerns more than *Private*, relating to this World only; *Spiritual* and *Heavenly* things more than things *Carnal* and *Earthly*; *Eternal* concerns more than *Temporary*; and God, who is infinitely above all, and whose both *Honour* and *Favour* is of nearer concernment to us than all things, is to be thought on more than all things. Such are the things which most deserve our serious thinking on.

2. Let us now see, what kind of thinking it is, that can deserve the name of *Consideration*. Or, how are these *considerable* things to be thought upon so, as that we may be truly said to *consider* them. It is certain, that every sort of *thinking* is not to be accounted *considering*. We have all of us a thousand rambling thoughts of many things, which we take so little into consideration, that we can give very little account how we came to think of them; and often can hardly remember that we did

so at all. Whilst we are awake always, and sometimes when we are asleep, our Heads are full of thoughts, which are very busie, or rather playing, even whether we will or no, about a multitude of little things, which we never thought worth one hours consideration. As in a Market-croud a Man may see a hundred Faces, and give every one he meets with a slight *Good-morrow*, or a *How-d' you*; and he hath some thoughts (such as they are) of every one, and yet takes no farther notice of them, these being Persons he is not then concern'd with. His business which brought him thither, is the only thing he thinks of then in good earnest: So most of the things we think of, we do but *remember* at most, or *occasionally* and *accidentally* they come into our minds; but as they come, so they go: Like to a thing that passeth by us in haste, we see it as it passes, and think but very little of it; but as we lose the sight of it, so do we the thoughts of it too; and are no more concern'd about it, than as if we had never seen it, or as if there had never been such a thing. The thinking of a thing which may be call'd *Consideration*, is a *design'd*, *concern'd*, *leisurely*, *serious* and *thorough* thinking of it.

1. It is a *designed* thinking, with a full purpose of mind to inform our selves better about it; a summoning up of our thoughts, and a diligent setting them on work. It is not a thought that a Man hits on by chance, and which

which stays with him a while, tho' he never intended it; but that which is sought, chosen, and invited. As 'tis said, *Psal. II. 2. The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together.* So a Man must set himself to consider, to advise with, and take counsel of his own Reason. This is an usual thing with most Men in any great Difficulty or Danger which they apprehend, to set themselves to think and contrive what course is fittest for them to take. Neither will any wise man neglect this. And why should not we set our selves to consider and contrive for our safety, who meet with daily so many difficulties in our way to Heaven, and are in so great danger to come short of it?

2. It is a concerned thinking, as about that, the near and great concernment whereof to our selves we are very sensible of. We often think of things without any reflection on our selves, as upon matters that no way touch us. But we are not apt to be very serious about them, unless we apprehend our selves some way or other concerned in them. When David had determined evil against Nabal, Abigail's Servants desired her to consider well of it, *1 Sam. XXV. 17. Now therefore know and consider what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household.* She was to think of it as a matter that concern'd the Safety and Welfare of her self and Family. And thus the *Psalmist* speaking in God's Name to

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the wicked, *Psal. L. 22. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.* If we will pass our time in Peace and Comfort, we must not forget, but think much and very *concernedly* of God; considering well what it lieth us upon to live conformably to his Will, that we may never fall under his displeasure.

3. It is a *leisurely* thinking, a taking time to view and observe a thing exactly, together with all its circumstances, its conveniencies or inconveniencies, and all the evils or goods which attend it. Sudden Thoughts little deserve the name of Consideration. It is a laying things in order in our thoughts, with a design to conclude from them what may be, or ought to be done or expected by us. *Consider of it, take advice, and speak your minds,* say the *Israelites* one to another in the *Levites* case, *Judg. XIX. 30.* And so said *Elibu* to *Job*, *Hearken unto this, O Job, stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God,* *Job XXXVII. 14.* There is implied in it, *First*, A Preparing the Mind for it, by awakening it, and stirring it up from the bed of security, and an unthinking temper; such as the mind of habitual Sinners is even always in, in relation to Spiritual things, and of Eternal concernment, *Rise up Balak, and hear,* said *Balaam* to him, *Num. XXIII. 18.* Put the Mind into an attentive and considering posture. And then, *Secondly*, A laying aside all other business which may disturb our thoughts,

thoughts, or interrupt them ; shunning all distracting or diverting Objects, silencing all troublesome Affections and unruly Passions ; Give the Mind leave to do its own work ; It must not be let to run at random upon other things, it must not be disturb'd by any Passion, nor confounded with any throng of Business, but there must be Calm within, and a Quietness round about it : *Commune with your own hearts upon your bed, and be still*, saith David, Psalm IV. 4. We must resolve to be deaf to the World, and our own Lusts, if we will consider to purpose the things that belong unto Eternity.

4. It is a *serious* and *earnest* thinking ; we must not be in jest, or indifferent in a matter of such weight and importance, that requires our greatest intention, care and diligence, no less than Eternal Life or Death depending on the result of our Thoughts and Self-consultations. Trivial matters may be slightly thought on, but matters of moment call for serious Debates. And hence Consideration is usually express'd by such words as import a *seriousness*. God, 'tis certain, because of his Divine Perfections, needs not to consider of any thing ; yet when he is spoken of in *Holy Scripture*, as observing the behaviour of Men, in order to Rewards or Punishment, as tho' he were considering of them, he is said to *Weigh, Ponder, Examine, or Try*, &c. *The Lord weigheth the spirits*, Prov. XVI. 2. *He pondereth the hearts*, Prov. XXI. 2. *The ways*

of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings, Prov. V. 21. Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps? Job XXXI. 4. And the wise King, speaking of the Arts of the strange Woman to entice a Man, saith, They are to divert him from considering; lest he should ponder the path of life, Prov. V. 6. 'Tis said of the Blessed Virgin Mary, that she kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart, Luke II. 19. σωτηρίας, she preserved and kept them safe together in her Memory; συμβάλλουσα, conferring and disputing within her self about them. And of the Scribes and Pharisees we read, Mark II. 6. that they were διαλογιζόμενοι ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ, reasoning in their Hearts; discoursing within themselves, as tho' two Persons had been in their Breasts discoursing Dialogue-wise the one with the other. It was an excellent Precept which Pythagoras gave to his Scholars, Sleep not till thou hast run over in thy mind all thy works of the day past, and ask thy self, Whither have I gone? What have I done? What have I left undone? Consideration is a Man's posing himself, examining his Heart, advising with his own Reason very seriously. It is a bethinking ones self, 1 Kings VIII. 47. A laying a thing to heart, Isaiah LVII. 1. An applying ones heart to a matter, Hag. I. 5.

5. It is a thorough thinking, leaving nothing unthought on, neither ceasing to think on, till one come to the end of thinking; that is, to a right understanding of the matter, and a stedfast resolution

resolution about it: It is such a *reasoning* and *discoursing*, as brings one to his *Conclusion* and *final Determination*. Otherwise all is to no purpose, and a Man hath nothing but his labour for his pains, and had as good never have begun, as never come to an end. *Resolution* is the end of *Consideration*, and *Practice of Resolution*. And herein lies all practical *Wisdom* or *Prudence*, Not *rashly*, *inconsiderately* and *blindly*, and at all Adventures to rush on, whatever it is we have a mind to do; or which way soever our natural Inclinations and Affections would carry us; but to *consult* with our Reason, and be well *advised* in all things, *deliberating* and *debating* the matter well with our selves, and with calm and serious Thoughts, rationally concluding what is best to be done, and how it may be done to good purpose. A thinking on some few things relating to a business, is not enough, but all *considerable Circumstances* are to be *thoroughly* pondered. Nothing is to be left out of our Consideration, which may alter the case in hand, or hath any weight in it, which may turn the Scales either the one way, or the other. The *nature* of the thing what it is, *necessary* or *unnecessary*, *profitable* or *hurtful*, *weighty* or *light*, *lawful* or *unlawful*, *expedient* or *inexpedient*: the *ends* and *uses* of it, the *arguments persuading* to it, or *dissuading* from it; the *rules* and *measures* whereby all is to be regulated, the *agreement* with, or *swerving* from such rules; the *benefits*, *advantages* and *gains* on the one side, and the

the *dangers, disadvantages and losses* on the other; the *necessary preparations, helps, instruments and encouragements*; together with the *difficulties, hinderances and discouragements* that we may meet with; and the *ways and means* of removing or overcoming them; and whatever else may have any influence upon the matter to be considered. Thus whatever the things be which fall under Consideration, whether they be *past, present, or to come*, Consideration is such a *designed, concerned, leisurely, calm, serious and thorough* thinking on them, and an *inward reasoning*, or a *mental discoursing* about them, and about all things pertaining to them, as may help us to order all things prudently, and to the best advantage; so as we may reap as much good, and sustain as little hurt by every thing as may be. That whatever we do, or whatever befalls us, may as little hinder, and as much promote our happiness, as it is in our power to make it; and that if we cannot keep our selves from all evil or hurt, yet at least we may not do any thing to make our selves miserable.

By what hath been here said, we may understand, what that *Inconsideration* is, which God complaineth of, and is indeed the sin of a great many. It is a *careless and unthinking* temper of Mind; and they who are of this temper, venture boldly, rashly, and unadvisedly upon any thing, as it falleth in their way; never inquiring how pleasing or displeasing it may be to God, or
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what it may bring upon themselves in the end. They review not what is past, to find out wherein they have erred or offended, and what stands in need of mending, or blotting out, and undoing again by *Repentance*. They think not wisely on what they go about at present, to observe its fitness or unfitness to be attempted, or to do it by a right rule, and to a right end, and to take care that they neither do any hurt, nor lose their labour. They think not providently on the future, what either *must* or *may* come, so as to prepare and provide as they ought for it, but are without either fear or forecast. And what the evil of this is, I am next to shew.

S E C T. II.

The Evils of Inconsideration.

IT is so visible to all the World, that *Inconsideration* is a very ill thing, that in the most common concerns and affairs of this Life, there is hardly any one that seems not very sensible of it. There are few *Tradesmen*, or *Husbandmen*, or *Artificers*, how mean a Trade soever they drive in the World, but they are aware of it: And all seem satisfied, that nothing can ordinarily succeed well under our hands, and that there can be small hopes of thriving by what we undertake, if we do not wisely consider

sider of it. If an unconsidering Man speed well, 'tis only by chance ; and it's not above once or twice, it may be, in a hundred times ; and few Men are willing to venture any thing they prize, upon the success of such blind and giddy doings. Men therefore, in all matters of moment, set themselves seriously to think what they have to do, and to what end they do it ; how it is to be done , and what helps they stand in need of, and how to have them ; what letts and rubs there are in their way, and how they may be removed ; what they may hope for, as the fruit of their care, skill, and industry ; and what they may fear, as the consequent of their negligence, ignorance, idleness, or any miscarriage. If any one do not consider these things, Men count him a Fool ; and every one is ready to read his Fortune for him, and say, he is not like to thrive. *Which of you (saith Christ, Luke XIV. 28, 31.) intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it ? Or what king going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and considereth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand ? What Husbandman goeth to plow, and sitteth not down first, and considereth whether his Ground be in good heart, and like to bear any burden ; whether the Season be proper for his work, and all his Instruments in good order ; whether his Oxen be tractable, and in good plight ; and his Ser-*
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vants well vers'd in the work they go about; whether his Seed be found, and himself of sufficient Ability to manage all to good advantage. So wise are the Men of this World in their Generation for their worldly ends, that they think not fit to venture all at random without due consideration. And shall we be so foolish as to imagine, that the great business we are to do, to secure unto our selves a blessed Eternity, should either deserve or require less consideration, than the things which relate to our short continuance in this World only? Let the miscarriage we are guilty of in our worldly concerns be what it will, the evils which we incur by it will shortly have an end, and we shall no more remember them: But if we miscarry in the business we are now to do for Eternity, it is that which draws after it evils both endless and intollerable. And this is enough of it self to rouse us up to the consideration of these things. An affright will often bring a Man to serious Thoughts, when nothing else will; And can there be any thing more terrible, than a prospect of Eternal Torments? But this is not all the evil of *Inconsideration*, tho' it be that which is most apt to awaken the *Inconsiderate*. I do no more but mention it now, in hope that the fear of being everlastingly miserable, which will certainly be the end of unconsidering People, bringing us to some degree of seriousness, we may be capable of discerning other great evils in it, such as are these following:

I. Not

1. Not to consider the things on which our Eternal State depends, is not to behave ourselves like Men, but to act quite contrary to our Nature. *Reason* is a thing Essential to *Man*; and only *Man*, of all inferior Creatures, is able to make this use of it; I mean, to *consider* things. To this end is it given us, and if we make not this use of it, we had as good have been without it. *Trees* and *Plants* grow, and bear Fruit; but they cannot consider how they do so, nor what they do. *Beasts* and other *Animals* live and move, eat and drink, and do such things as are agreeable to their Nature: But they *consider* not, they do not *deliberate* within themselves about their Actions, or their Ends; but are carryed on by their Senses, and a natural Appetite, without pondering of Circumstances, and debating in their Breasts what is most fit or unfit to be done, or what is like to follow upon the doing or omitting of any thing. Only *Man*, of all earthly Creatures, hath *Reason* and *Understanding*, and thereby is fitted for *deliberating*, *consulting*, and *discoursing* things over within himself, and for *contriving*, *forecasting*, and *ordering* all he doth to good ends and purposes. And if he doth not make this use of his Understanding and Reason, he acts contrary to the *Nature* which God hath given him. Yea, and in effect, he seems to impute *Vanity* and *Impertinency* to the *All-wise God*; as tho' he had given him so noble a Faculty, as *Reason* is, in vain, and for no use at all; For what

else is the use of *Reason*, but *Consideration*? If a Man may act like a Beast, without Consideration, why should not God have made him like a Beast too, without Reason? If any say, We have the important Affairs of this Life to consider, and this is to use our Reason well: I readily grant it; but deny withal, that this is either all the use, or the chief use for which our Reason was given us. Had God made us for this World only, and if there were nothing for us to enjoy, or to suffer, but in this short Life, the use of our Reason might well be confined to things of this present World and Life. But seeing God has design'd us to be Immortal, and hath made our Life on Earth to be but a time of Probation, and Preparation for Eternity; to use our Reason either *only*, or *chiefly* about the Affairs of this World, is as unnatural an abuse as we can make of it. Can there be any thing more against Reason, than to think it was given us to consider least the things that are most considerable? And can there be a more unreasonable thing, than to consider more how we may make a shift to spend a few Days here upon Earth, than how we may be sure of living an Eternal Life of Happiness with God in Heaven? Nay, to what purpose shall we consider what to do in this World, and how to make the best Advantage of it for the very short time that we are to continue in it, if in the mean time we consider not, what shall become of us when we

go out of it, nor how to improve our being in this World, so as to save our selves from being eternally miserable in the World to come when ever we depart hence, which may be, for ought we know, the very next moment. If *self-preservation* be that which all Men naturally desire and aim at, it must be most of all things against Nature, to consider least the things whereby we may be *Eternally preserved* from the Torments of Hell-Fire, and in a State of Everlasting Joy and Blessedness. Certainly, if God have given us Reason for any thing, it must be *chiefly*, and above all things, for this, To consider how we may best Serve and Honour Him, and promote our own Eternal Happiness. If we do not make this use of our Reason, it will be hard to say, what advantage we have by our Reason above the most Unreasonable Creatures: For Beasts have less Trouble without Reason in this Life, than men have with it. And had men the same *end* that beasts have, and there were nothing at all to be considered, but what concerns this Life; possibly it had been better for the World if all men had had as little Reason as they; for all the good it seems to do, is to make men more Sensible of their own Miseries, and more able to make others Miserable. Without this use of Reason, what difference can there be betwixt us and Mad-men? The greatest difference between a man that is Sober, and one that is Mad, seems to be this; That the one hath the
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right use of Reason, and the other hath lost it : The one Acts Considerately, and the other Rashly without consideration. And certainly he is the maddest of all Mad-men, whatever he considers as to this Life, that runs laughing into Hell-Fire, never considering what he shall endure there. Such an *Unnatural* thing is it for men to lead an *Inconsiderate* Life.

2. Without *Serious Consideration*, all the means of Happiness, which God hath been Graciously Pleas'd most Plentifully to afford us in CHRIST JESUS, are lost upon us, and we can have no benefit by them. None of the means of *Grace and Salvation*, which are given us of God, work on the hearts of men, as *Plaisters and Salves* do upon their bodies, whether they think of them or no. But all these things work *morally* by our *consideration*, and *mental application* of them. The *Word of God* affects not the Heart, nor works any change in the man, by being *heard* alone, but by being *considered*. Read the *Scripture* a thousand times over : whatever we may *know or remember* more, yet shall we not be made *better* by it without *considering* it. The *Sacraments*, how often soever received, Seal no good at all unto us, if they be not *considered*. The things that were spoken of *Paul*, had had no more Operation upon *Lydia's* heart, than they had upon many of the hard hearted *Jews*, if the Lord had not opened her heart to *attend* unto them, and *consider* them. The good seed falling into the good

and *honest* heart, is therein Cherished by *consideration*, and so it brings forth Fruit. Therefore said St. Paul well, *Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things*, 1 Tim. 2. 7. Whatsoever methods God useth to bring us to Happiness in Himself, he brings us *first* to *Our selves*, with the *Prodigal Son* in the *Parable*, Luke 15. 17. He awakens us some way or other to a Serious Consideration, or all will be lost upon us. His *Word* and *Sacraments*, his *Judgments* and *Mercies*, nor any thing else, hath any effect upon our Souls, unless it be to the greater hardning of our Hearts, without setting our thoughts on work about them. And this is the Reason why notwithstanding the abundance of Means we enjoy, so few are Sanctified and Saved.

3. The want of *Consideration* makes all that ever we do, even our most *Religious Exercises*, all our most *Charitable Deeds*, and whatever is by God's *Command*, or in its own *Nature* otherwise good and profitable to men, altogether *unprofitable* to us, and *Unacceptable* to God. God always expects from us a *reasonable Service*, and a *Spiritual Worship*; such as is suitable both to *His Nature* and *our own*; which we can never give unto him, without much Serious Consideration. All things, even to our very *Eating* and *Drinking*, or whatsoever else we do, must be done to the *Glory* of God, 1 Cor. 10. 31. All our *Thoughts*, *Words* and *Actions*, must be regulated, as well as we can,
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by the Rule of his Commandments: and this is certainly a thing impossible to be done, without a very serious exercising of our mind about every thing. Therefore did God reject as an *Abomination* and a *Weariness* to him, all the *Sacrifices* and *Religious Worship* of the *Jews*; and whatever they did to honour him by; because they did all in a *formal* and *customary* way, not considering the *ends* and *significations* of them; nor the *qualifications* requisite in the *Worshippers* to render them *Acceptable*, *Isa. I.* And our Blessed *JESUS* hath assured us, that all our *Fastings*, and *Alms*, and *Prayers*, shall lose the reward *Promised*, as often as they are done without due *consideration* of the right *end* and *manner*, *Matt. VI. 1, &c.* Now what a wretched condition is that man in, all whose *Addresses* to *Heaven*, and all whose good deeds on *Earth* can do him no good? And such is the case of every *unconsidering* person.

4. Through *Inconsideration* it is that all *Temptations*, even such as had we our Wits about us, we would be ashamed to be soiled by, prove too strong for us, and have power enough to draw us from our *Duty* into *Sin*. A weak Child may kill a Man that's fast asleep. A very little thing in a *Man's* way, will give him a fall, that minds not where he steps: And he whose reason is asleep, or busie about *impertinencies*, is easily surprized by any little *Temptation*. It's no hard matter to beguile one that is *careless* and *secure*, and never thinks

himself in any danger of being deceived. It would not be so easy, as most of us find it to our cost, for many of those *Temptations* whereby we are daily overcome; to prevail against us, had we our Eyes always open to see what they are, and what reason we have to withstand them. Would we seriously think with our selves, how little it is that the *Temptation* promiseth, and how much less it performeth; how little we shall gain, and how much we shall lose by yielding; we would even scorn to be so soft, as to be wrought on by most of those things, whereby we are now without much ado drawn into the vilest Sins. Why doth the *Young man* so easily yield to the *flatteries* and *entice-ments* of the *Impudent Whore*, *Prov. VII.* but that he goes on without consideration? he goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, and as a fool to the correction of the Stocks. *V. 22.* As a bird hasteth to the Snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life. *V. 23.* Whoso is simple (saith the foolish woman) let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, *Stolen waters are sweet, &c.* But he knoweth not, that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell, *Prov. IX. 16, 17, 18.*

That *Inconsideration* giveth the greatest strength they have to most *Temptations*, is very plain from those *Excuses* men are wont to make for themselves when they have Sinned. What is it which they commonly plead for themselves but this, *That they did not think it to be a Sin;*
That

That they hoped there had been no great evil in what they did; If they had thought there was so much evil in it, they would not have done it? Now if they speak truly, 'tis plain that they had not been tempted but through *Inconsideration*. And indeed it is hardly imaginable, how the number of wicked People should be half so great as it is, were it not for this, that they consider too little what they do. We cannot think that in a *Christian Church* people should live many years, and yet never hear of the things which are daily taught therein; and yet these are enough, one would think, to make them fearful to live Wickedly, and to arm them sufficiently against all Temptations, were they duly considered. When we hear how strictly a most *Just, Good, Almighty, and Omniscient* God hath forbidden all Wickedness upon pain of *Eternal Damnation*; and how the same *Great God* hath Commanded Holiness, and encouraged us to it with the *Gracious Promises* of *Pardon* for all past Sins, and *Acceptance* of *Weak, if Sincere*, endeavours and performances of Duty through *JESUS CHRIST*, and for his sake of the reward of *Eternal Life*: How were it possible for us, for the sake of a little *short* and often *filthy* Pleasure; for the *shadow* of Honour, or for a little *dirty* and *uncertain* Wealth, and all but for a few Days, to venture upon Sin, did we ever consider things Seriously? No, we see it, that when men are at any time awakened into serious consideration by some sharp *Affliction*,

tion, by an apprehension of some great and imminent *Danger* or *Sickness*; they can *despise* all these *Temptations*, and *resist* them; and if when the *Danger*, *Fear*, or *Pain* is over, they are again enticed by the like *Baits*, 'tis only because through their *ease*, their *consideration* is fallen asleep again. So plain is it, that the greatest advantage that any *Temptation* can have over us, is that which we give it, by not considering things as we ought to do.

5. Nothing more certainly ruins us eternally, than *Inconsideration*, and that both because it keeps us in *Ignorance*, and hinders us from that *Exercise* of *Grace*, which by Faith in CHRIST JESUS should bring us to Heaven.

Inconsideration holds us *ignorant* both of *God* and *our selves*; and so never well understanding, because never thoroughly considering what we hear and read, what we see and feel; the Goodness and other Attributes of *God*, our obligations to him, and dependance on him on the one side, nor our own needs, our weakness and miserable condition, when our selves alone on the other side; we rush on blindly and boldly, and the more *blindly* always the more *boldly* too, fearing nothing, because we see nothing; and seeing nothing, because we will not open our eyes to see and consider what lies plain and visible before us. *A prudent man foreseeth the evil and hideth himself, but the simple pass on and are punished*, Prov. XXII. 3. *A wise man feareth and departeth from evil, but the fool rageth*

rageth and is confident, Prov. XIV. 16 They consider not that they do evil, Eccl. V. 1. The harp, and the viol, and wine, are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands, Isa. V. 12. They consider not in their hearts, that I remember all their wickedness, Hos. VII. 2. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider, Isa. I. 3.

Again, *Inconsideration* hinders all those Exercises of Grace, whereby through Faith in CHRIST, we might escape Death, and be prepared for Life Eternal.

Who can Repent of the Sins which he hath not duly Considered, with all their aggravations? He that examineth not himself often, he that never reviews his Conversation, nor inquires into the temper of his own Heart, is like to prove a sorry penitent. He that considers not the Law of God, knoweth not wherein he hath Transgressed; and he that considereth not his own Life, cannot lay his Sin to Heart. He that thinketh not much both of the vileness and danger of his Sin, will hardly bring his heart to be sorry for it, or to hate it. Whilst we are secure and careless how we spend our days, what can be expected, but that we lie still in our Filth, and hold on confidently Dishonouring God to our own Destruction? *I hearkned and heard (saith God) but they spake not aright; no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle,* Isa. VIII. 6.

Who can have any Comfort in his life past, that considers not how he hath spent it, whether Sinfully and Vainly, or Virtuouſly and Piously? Who can cheer up his Soul in God, and rejoyce in the Lord? Who can arm himself against the Terrors of Death, and in hope expect the great Judgment to come, who never yet caſt up his account, nor conſidered what he hath been doing all his days, nor how far he is run in arrear with God? How ſhall an unconfidering man ever be able to ſay with St. Paul, Acts XXIII. 1. *I have lived in all good conſcience before God unto this day?* Or as he again, 2 Cor. I. 12. *Our rejoycing is this, the testimony of our Conſcience, that in ſimplicity and godly ſincerity we have had our converſation in the world?*

Who can be thankful to God for all the Mercies he hath received, and all the wonders of his Goodneſs vouchſafed to him in all the parts of his life, that hath not conſider'd them well? Who can improve the Bleſſings of God to God's Honour, and the good of himſelf and others, that ſeldom thinks of them? What obligations to God can we be ſenſible of in all the great things which he hath wrought for us, whiſt we mind them not?

How can we live and act any otherwiſe but looſely and irregularly, running headlong into all wickedneſs, and upon any danger, ſo long as we conſider not what a God we have over us, and what Rules he hath given us, and how much we are concerned to obſerve them? For want of conſidering it is, that we do all things
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at random, without any regard to the *Ends* or *Consequents* of our *Actions*. Our *Love*, our *Fear*, our *Desire*, our *Hope*, our *Trust*, our *Obedience*, are all misplaced; we keep to no *Rules*, nor tie our selves up to any *Laws*; we omit our *Duties* to *God*, our *Neighbours*, and our own *Souls*: we commit things *abominable* and *hurtful*; *dishonourable* to *God*, and *destructive* to our selves; most *unbecoming* both our *Nature* and our *Profession*; against our own comfort and happiness; we consume our *Time* in *Idleness*, *Folly*, and *Vanity*, because we Consider not for what we live, nor whose we are, nor what we are to account for: And by all this we lose our *Hope*, and *Confidence*, and *Assurance*, and all that might stand us in any stead in the Hour of Death, and Day of Judgment. O that we were wise, that we understood this, that we would consider our latter end! Deut. 32. 29.

SECT. III.

The Causes of INCONSIDERATION.

HAVING seen some of the *Evils* of *Inconsideration*; we will, if we be wise, labour to be cured in time of so dangerous a distemper; but this will not be done, unless the *Causes* of it be removed. Let us therefore next inquire into these, and endeavour to put them away. Amongst others, we are especially to take notice of these which here I shall point out. I. The

1. The first is *Ignorance*: For I doubt not but many would consider more than they do, if they knew either *What* to consider, or *How* to consider, or what it *lieth* them upon to consider. But alas! we may to as good purpose bid a blind man see, or a deaf man hear, as exhort an ignorant man to consider any thing at present, but his Ignorance. Consideration is the exercise of Knowledge, and the improving of it to practice; but no man can exercise what he hath not; *A brutish man knoweth not, neither doth a fool understand this*, Psal. XCII. 6. *Therefore the way of a fool is right in his own eyes*, Prov. XII. 15. because he knoweth no better. Ignorance therefore must be removed in the first place, that a man may be able to consider: And yet, tho' this in many may be the cause of *Inconsideration*, these many are but few in comparison of those who have eyes and see not; who know, and yet consider as little as if they knew nothing. We must therefore seek out other Causes of this Evil.

2. And the next I shall name, is *Presumption*; which I take to be as common a Cause of *Inconsideration*, as any other whatsoever. Men generally presume too much upon their Skill and Knowledge, and are too confident to see their need of Consideration. And there is a manifold *Presumption* which causeth a neglect of due Consideration.

A man, as but now was said, may presume too much of his own Knowledge, and Wisdom,
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and *Dexterity*, as one that is so ready and expert in the right management of his Affairs, that he can do all things off-hand, without any puzzling thoughts about it: Now *there is more hope of a fool*, than of one that is thus wise in his own conceit, Prov. XXVI. 12. The greatest Miscarriages in the world are owing to a *conceited and confident Ignorance*, and a *Presumption* of a man's own *Wit and Understanding*, thinking himself too wise and knowing, to take Advice of others; and scorning to seem so dull, as to need much consulting with his own Reason.

A man may presume too much upon the *Easiness* of the Work he hath to do, and take the way to Heaven to be so open, and plain, and safe, that he needs not be at the trouble of much enquiry and circumspection in his walking. He may imagine God requires no such accuracy and strictness in framing our whole Conversation by his Laws, as the more scrupulous sort of men do think. There needs not, saith he, so much ado about the business of Salvation, that a man must be always busying his mind about it. We have a round of Duties to run, and when we have done that, 'tis done: As tho God did consider as little as we are apt to do; *He hath said to God in his heart, Thou wilt not require it*, Psal. X. 13.

One may presume, *That all is well with him already*, and that he hath already made his *Calling and Election* sure: He hath already got,

as he thinks, into the right and sure way, and hath no more to trouble his head about, but only to go on the same way still, without any further thinking of it: *There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death,* Prov. XIV. 12.

Some may possibly presume, *That they do consider things well enough*, even when they never have any such thought of them as can deserve to be call'd Consideration. Now and then, it may be, they think a little of the things that ought to be considered; and it would be strange if they did not, when they are so often put in mind of them; but alas! that *thorough weighing and pondering* of things in their minds, which before was shewn to be Consideration, they are mere strangers to, and never once went about it. And in this vain confidence, of having done what they never in earnest endeavour'd to do, they pass their time without considering, till considering can do them no good.

Others presume, *That they have day enough before them*, and they will consider of it sometime before night. They will, and they will, but they will not yet; because they presume it will be time enough to do it anon; and it is always too soon, till it be quite too late. And thus through a foolish presumption of one thing or other, many of us are kept from considering, till there be nothing left us to consider, but this one sad thing, That we have lost our opportunity;

portunity; 'tis now too late, and Consideration is become a great part of that Torment, which it should have prevented.

3. Another Cause of *Inconsideration*, is our long neglect of considering, and an *unthinking Habit* of Mind. Hence Consideration, when we are call'd to it, is an uncouth thing to us; and we have been so long strangers to it, that we know not how to come acquainted with it, nor how to entertain it. We have used our selves to another course a great deal more easie, and have got a custom of doing things inconsiderately. We do as we have been bidden to do by others, or as we see others do, or as our own Inclinations and Affections lead us to do; but we have not been used to think for our selves, what is rational or our duty; what is lawful, or what is fit, and becomes or behoves us to do. We go down with the stream of custom or inclination, and we slide smoothly and pleasantly away; but we have not been wont to consider to what purpose we do so, or into what Gulfs we may be carried, or how we shall get out again. When we have been, it may be, the greatest part of our age accustomed to act all things like children, to suffer our thoughts to run loosely, wildly, and rovingly without check, we know not which way to get them together again, or to fix them in seriousness upon any thing, nor how to get into any method of Thinking; hence it is very uneasie to us to consider, and we are soon weary of it.

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4. Another Cause therefore of our continuing inconsiderate, is our *Slorb* and *Laziness*. We cannot endure the pains of confining our Thoughts to the things which should be considered; and the less can we away with it, because this would, as we conceive, abridge us of much, not ease only, but liberty and pleasure too, which we have been wonted to, in thinking on every thing that we have most mind to, or on any thing that falls in our way. To tye up our thoughts to rules, to restrain them within a certain compass, to direct them to a certain mark, is a task of too much trouble to most of us: Especially Spiritual and Eternal things afford the Sensual man no delight at all, they are very melancholly subjects, and he is soon weary of them. It requires much pains and attention of mind to drive away those wanton and frolick thoughts which our Lusts and Vanities commend unto us, and are always sending in to disturb us. And who of a thousand, especially if *young* and *lively*, hath patience to endure this?

5. There is also another Cause, and that not uncommon, of Inconsideration, which is, An *Unwillingness to see our own sins in their own colours*. Every considering person must needs quickly discover his own *Filthiness*, *Shame*, and *Guilt*; and not these only; but the great danger he is in because of his sins: And we had most of us rather be blind, than see such a melancholly and frightful sight. Alas! Such a sight
would

would mightily disturb us, and break off our sweet slumbers, spoil our pleasant dreams, and make us a terror to our selves. Our Consciences would be thus awakened, and fly angrily in our faces, and be continually reproaching us with our folly and wickedness. This most of us are apt to look upon as a very *uncomfortable*, and even an *intolerable* condition; and therefore madly chuse to venture all, and to go on quietly, with sleeping Consciences that cannot check us, tho we drop unawares into Hell by doing so, than by Consideration to awaken them, and endure their rebukes, tho we can no otherwise be safe, and arrive at Eternal Blessedness.

6. The last Cause of Inconsideration I shall mention, is our *busying your selves too much other ways*, so that we grudge our selves time and leisure to consider. Our thoughts are almost constantly otherwise engaged, and cannot break loose from such things as have got the mastery and command of our affections. With *Martha* they are troubled about many things, and hardly ever at leisure for the *one thing necessary*. What one of a hundred of us makes *Religion* his business? We account the matters of the world our business, that calls for Seriousness; and *Religion* a thing only now and then to be thought on a little by the by, and when we have nothing else to do, or rather are forced to it. Or 'tis, if a business at all, only like that of dressing our selves on some certain days,
a little

a little finer than ordinary; a *Festival* or *Holidays* work, little better than a Play. Now what we make our main business, is always the thing that we most consider, be it never so trivial and needless: To dress our meat daintily, to fit fashionable Cloaths on our Bodies, to beautifie our Houses at home, and visit our idle Neighbours abroad; this we can make our business, consider, and contrive, and often break our sleep to think how all may be done most modishly, and with the best grace for our credit: But the business of *Religion*, as tho it were a matter to be done, as they say, with a wet finger, it's enough to think of it when the Bell rings, or it may be, when we are indisposed for company, and have a mind to be alone, and can think of nothing else to divert our selves with. And this thoughtfulness about all things else, even tho of least concernment, is one main cause why so few consider the things that belong to their Everlasting Peace.

If then we will root out the *Causes* of this Evil Disease, we must take care in time to furnish our selves with a competent stock of *Divine Knowledge*; we must pass the time of our sojourning here in *fear*, and beware of *Presumption*, and an ill-grounded *Confidence*; we must apply our selves to learn the *Art* of considering, and accustom our selves to *Seriousness* and *serious Company*; we must shake off *Sloth* and *Laziness*, and watch against all *Sin*, which makes us afraid to know our selves; and lastly,

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We must not plunge our selves too deep into worldly *business*; and we must lay aside all needless *curiosity*, and affectation of *modish vanity*. In short, We must labour to understand, that the business of serving God, and saving our Souls, is a thing of nearer concernment to us, than all other businesses whatever: and resolve to make it so, and then be sure it will be consider'd accordingly, and our *most serious thoughts* will be employ'd about it.

S E C T. IV.

What things we are to Consider.

WHEN we are sensible of the *Evils* of *Inconsideration*, and understand the *Causes* of it; no more can be needful to teach us either *why*, or *how* we are to avoid it. And certainly we can need no motive to practice any thing, which we know it is so necessary for us to practice, that if we do it not, we must be eternally miserable. Supposing therefore, that enough hath been said to convince us, that Consideration is altogether necessary; Lest any one should be at a loss how to find out fit matter for it; I shall now point out to him some few of those things which ought principally to be considered; and for want of considering whereof, our lives are generally so unanswerable to our Profession, and so displeasing to Almighty God.

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Now whatsoever things it hath pleased God in much goodness and mercy to *reveal* and make known unto us, in relation either to his own *Honour*, or to our *Salvation*, we must needs acknowledge to deserve our very serious consideration. For to this end hath God *revealed* them to us, that they may be *considered* by us, and by consideration have that influence upon us which they ought to have. That knowing God, we may glorify him as God; and knowing our selves, we may behave our selves like men; that is, like the rational Creatures of God, to whom he hath given Reason and Understanding to know our dependance on him, and our duty to him.

Wherefore hath God been pleas'd to reveal unto us the History of the *Creation* of the World, and of his admirable *Providence* over it in all the Ages of it, but that we might *know* and *consider* the work of his Hand, and the method of his Government; that we might see his Infinite *Power*, and *Wisdom*, and *Goodness*; his *Truth* and *Purity*, his *Justice* and his *Mercy*; whom we are to *praise* for our being and subsistence; to whom we are to *pray* for needful supplies of all our wants; whom we are to *serve* and *obey*, and in whom we are to *trust* and put our *confidence*; and to whose will and ordering we ought to *submit*, and *resign* our selves?

Wherefore hath God been pleas'd to reveal unto us so many *Divine Truths* in his Word, concerning his own *Nature*, and his gracious
Designs

Designs for us, the *Eternal State of Happiness* provided for us, and the *Methods* he is pleas'd to use to bring men into it through the *Redemption* and *Mediation* of JESUS CHRIST, and by the *Illumination* and *Sanctification* of the HOLY GHOST, but that we might *understand* and *believe* these things; and *considering* them wisely, bring our selves to an humble and thankful *compliance* with all his gracious *Designs* for our blessedness, wherein he delights to be glorified?

Wherefore hath God given us so many holy *Precepts* and *Rules* of living, but that we should *learn* them, and *consider* them, and rule our whole *Conversation* by them?

Wherefore hath he made so many Gracious *Promises* to the Faithful and Obedient, and *Threatned* such terrible things to unbelievers and wicked persons? Wherefore hath he executed such severe *Judgments* on the stubborn and rebellious; and shewn such *Mercy*, and given such *Deliverances* to the humble and penitent? Is not all this done, to the end that we should diligently *observe* and *consider* all these things; and by his *Promises* and *Mercies* encourage our selves in his *Worship* and *Service*; and by his *Menaces* and *Judgments* learn to stand in awe of him, and tremble to offend him?

Indeed there is nothing in God's *Word* or in his *Works*, but calls for our *Serious Consideration*; and we can never do our *Duty*, or come to the *Blessedness* we desire, without a due

considering of them. But that which I would here do, is to shew and point out some special matters of Consideration, which it chiefly concerns us, even daily, to bear in mind, and to exercise our thoughts upon: Such as these.

I. *That we are not our own, neither is any thing at all absolutely ours:* But we are his, who made us, and placed us here; and all things in the World, who ever possesseth and enjoyeth them, are always *His*. It is *God* that made us, and not we our selves; therefore, we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture, Psal. C. 3. Yea, will some say, who knows not this? Indeed we all either do, or may know it; but alas! Who Considers it? I fear hardly one of a hundred. The careless and dissolute Lives of a great many tells us very plainly, That whatever they know of this, they *Consider* it not. If we send our Servants into the Field to labour for us, and to do our work, and they do nothing there but play and idle away their time; and after they are told of it again and again, they take no farther notice of it, but follow their old wont: Will we say, that they consider whose Servants they are, and what they have to do? If we trust them with our Money, and direct them how to lay it out for our use; and they game and drink it away, and give us no better account of it, but that they have spent it on their own Lusts and Vanities: Will we say, they consider whose Stewards they are, and what their Duty is? Do such Servants consider, that they
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are not their own, and that the Money they have is not their own? How then doth that man Consider that he is not his own, but God's, who Serveth not God but himself, and who wasteth what he hath on his own Sins, instead of improving it to God's Glory? If we will be kept within any bounds of Duty, or in the way to Life, this must be much in our thoughts.

The Reason why men take to themselves so much liberty, as most of us do, is, because we too little consider, that we are God's Creatures and Servants. For want of Considering this, we live and do as we list, follow our own wills, and take our own pleasure, as much as we dare for the Laws of man. Indeed we generally behave our selves, as if God had nothing to do with us or ours, and as if we had none to please but our selves, and men that have more Power than we. But if we would be Safe and Happy, we must take another course, and frequently think thus every one within himself. "Who made me but God?" "Who placed me here on the Earth but God?" "Who gave me what I have but God? Whose am I, but the same God's that made me?" "Whose work have I here to do, but his who sent me hither? By whose Order am I to dispose of what I have, but by his who gave it me? Whose Servant am I, but his who feeds me, and who alone can Reward or Punish me? And who feeds me, or can re-

“ ward or punish me, but he who is Lord of
 “ all things? Whom have I to Please, but him
 “ whose work I am to do? Whose work
 “ have I to do, but his whose I am, and who
 “ can and will call me to account? Whom
 “ am I to Praise and Glorify, but him, from
 “ whom I and all things came, by whom I and
 “ all things are preserved? What am I to do
 “ with my self and what I have, but that for
 “ which I was made, and for which all that
 “ I have was given me? Whose Orders am I
 “ to follow in spending my time, my estate,
 “ my strength of mind or body, but his who
 “ hath committed all these things to my trust?
 “ Who will call me to a reckoning for all I
 “ have, and all I do, but he who gave me all,
 “ and hath given me Rules whereby to dispose
 “ of all? Whose Will am I to do? Mine own,
 “ or his whose I am, and who alone can make
 “ me happy? Who can make me Happy, but
 “ he who made me and all things? How then
 “ should I hope to be Happy, and not Miserable,
 “ but by Pleasing and Honouring him in
 “ doing his Will, and Obeying him in all things?
 O what a Reformation would such a consideration as this work in the lives of men! And unless we thus exercise our thoughts, we shall never learn to live like men.

2. Consider, that as we are God's, and all we have is his, and his work it is which we are to do: So we are always, and work always under his *Allseeing Eye*; and are to consider,

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what that Great God is whom we Serve, and in whose presence we always are. *The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good, Prov. XV. 3. All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do, Heb. IV. 13. The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings, Prov. V. 21.* O consider this all you that forget God, because you see him not! He always sees you, and cannot forget you. If any thing will make a Servant diligent in his business, and careful not to do amiss, this will, That his Master is always with him; and he who will certainly either Reward or Punish him according to his deeds, has his eye constantly upon him, and nothing can be hid from him. This therefore we should much Consider, that whereever we are, and whatever we are about, God is always with us, and sees us.

“ Let every one say to himself, I am now in
 “ the presence of the Great God, whose I am;
 “ he is now here with me, and hath his Eye
 “ upon me, though I see him not; observing
 “ my whole behaviour, and taking notice of all
 “ my Thoughts, Words, and Actions; from
 “ whomsoever I can hide them, I can never
 “ hide any of them from him. I had need
 “ therefore to take heed what I do, that all
 “ may please him, that every thing may be
 “ right in his Eyes, and such as he approveth
 “ of. For he is a most *Holy* God, of purer eyes
 “ than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity,

‘ Hab. I. 13. *The way of the wicked is an abomi-*
 ‘ *nation to the Lord*, Prov. XV. 9. He is an
 ‘ *Almighty and most Powerful God*, and is able
 ‘ *to cast both soul and body into hell*, Mat. X. 28.
 ‘ *He, even he is to be feared, and who may*
 ‘ *stand in his sight when he is angry!* Psal.
 ‘ LXXVI. 7. He is a most *Just God*, and the
 ‘ *Righteous Judge of all the World*. He will
 ‘ *not at all acquit the wicked*, Nah. I. 3. Seeing
 ‘ *this most Holy, Powerful and Just God is the*
 ‘ *Judge of all*, and will render to all accord-
 ‘ *ing to their works*; and seeing the same God
 ‘ *who is to judge us*, is always a present eye-
 ‘ *witness of every thing that we are to be*
judg’d for; certainly nothing can more deserve
 our Consideration than this; and no other con-
 sideration can more over-awe us into a due care-
 fulness to do always such things as we are sure
 are acceptable to him.

3. A third thing that we are much to Con-
 sider is this, That nothing in the World but
 a *sincere Holiness of heart and life*, can please
 this most Holy and All-seeing God. *Without*
holiness no man shall see the Lord, Heb. XII. 14.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see
God, Mat. V. 8. O how little is this Consider-
 ed by the generality of men! How few have
 this in their thoughts, *That to cleanse our selves*
from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to per-
fect holiness in the fear of the Lord, is the very
 work that the *Promises of God* should put us
 upon? Yet so it is, 2 Cor. VII. 1. and no other-
 wise

wife can we ever hope to be made partakers of the Blessings promised. O that we would think well of this, and seriously consider, if this be the business that we are continually a doing! If it be not, alas, what is it that we live for? what are we all our life long a labouring for? What, is it the business of our lives to make our selves Everlastingly Miserable? Are we hard at work, as most of us are one way or other, to no better purpose than to vex and provoke our Holy and Righteous God, and to heap up Wrath unto our selves against the day of Wrath? O what pains do we take to undo our selves, when we know that nothing but we our selves can undo us! Whatever we are a doing, if this be not our chief work, *to perfect Holiness*, the *one thing necessary* is still left undone; and we have yet done nothing to please God, and so had as good been doing nothing at all; seeing we are toiling all our days without any reason to hope that we shall be Happy, and reap any thing but bitterness from all our labour, when our days are ended. For *every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure*, 1 Joh. III. 3.

“ O consider it in good earnest, for it is a matter of moment! Shall we be so mad as to
 “ live to no other end, but to have time e-
 “ nough to make our selves intolerably wretch-
 “ ed? How! shall we tire and wear out our
 “ selves, merely to destroy our selves? Shall
 “ we toil like Oxen in the dirt of this World,
 “ merely to defile out selves, and make our
 “ selves

“ selves odious in the sight of our heavenly Fa-
 “ ther? Shall we trifle away all our time in sin,
 “ and folly, and vanity; to this good End, That
 “ we may be the surer of an eternity of Tor-
 “ ments and Sorrow? Alas, the World passeth
 “ away, and the Lusts thereof, to which we
 “ enslave our selves; and we draw near to Hell,
 “ and the flames which are unquenchable.
 “ Could we consider this, we would soon discern
what manner of persons we ought to be in all holy
conversation and godliness, 2 Pet. III. 11.

4. Consider often what a *price* God Almighty
 has set upon us; how wonderfully he hath ma-
 nifested his love towards us; and what great
 astonishing things he hath already done to make
 us happy in himself. The *Angels* of God, those
 glorious and holy Spirits, *desire to look into these*
things (1 Pet. I. 12.) with admiration and de-
 light, beholding therein the *manifold wisdom of*
God, Eph. III. 10. What more obliging course
 can we imagine God could have taken to bring
 Sinners in love with Him, and their own Hap-
 piness? How could he testify his love and care
 of us more convincingly than he hath done?
 How many notable ways doth he daily exercise
 his loving-kindness towards us? Is nothing of
 this worth our serious Consideration? No not
 this, that when by the breach of the *First Co-*
venant we were fallen under the Curse; instead
 of executing the judgment upon us which had
 been threatn'd, he was graciously pleas'd to
 make a *new one* with us, and a much easier
 too?

too? Nor this, That when we had done enough to destroy our selves, rather than let us perish, the most wonderful thing that ever was, must be contrived by Infinite Wisdom to procure us a Saviour? Had we deserved to die? God's own *eternal, only begotten, and beloved Son*, the *immortal God, and eternal Life*, must be brought into a capacity of *dying*, to redeem us. Were we become weak? *Omnipotence* it self must be cloath'd with the *weakness* of our Nature, and in that bear our sins and sorrows. The *Creator* of all things must be *made man of a woman*; The *King* of the whole world must be *made under the Law*, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of Sons, Gal. IV. 4, 5. Are we ignorant, and wicked? The *Holy Spirit* of God must be sent to be our *Teacher and Guide*, our *Sanctifier* and our *Comforter*. Have we, after all, need still of bodily succours and sustentances, of worldly delights and refreshments in our way to blessedness? Good God! what plenty and variety of all these doth he daily afford us! 'Tis plain, God would restrain us from nothing, but from doing our selves a mischief. How often have we broken his new Covenant of Grace, and sinned against the greatest of Mercies? And yet God spares us, and grants us time to repent in, and earnestly invites us to be happy; and loads us with all encouraging Blessings, both spiritual and temporal, every day. O consider all this, how wonderfully, how many ways, how often and long

long God hath shew'd himself gracious unto us in JESUS CHRIST! and *despise not the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not considering, that the goodness of God leadeth us to repentance,* Rom. II. 4.

5. Another thing which we should daily be thinking on so long as we live, is our *Latter End*; how soon it may come, and what it is like to be. *O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end,* Deut. XXXII. 29. An *End* will come; and it seems strange, that we should all know it, and few of us consider it to any purpose. We see every day in one or other, what is the end of all our Pleasures, and Honours, and Riches, and every thing that we here delight in. All these are at an end when death comes; and it is coming, and at hand, none of us knows how near. We are sure it cannot be very far off; and every day we are sure it is nearer than it was the day before; and the longer we live, the nearer it is still. And though all the things we are now so fond of, end in death, yet death will not make an end of us; for after death is the Judgment, when *we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad,* 2 Cor. 5. 10. Neither is there an end of us then, but according to the Sentence which shall then pass upon us, *Some shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal,*

Matth.

Matth. 25. 46. Now did we seriously consider this, that our End is like to have no end, but is an endless state of Blessedness or Misery, surely we would come a little sooner to our selves, and learn the wit to ask our selves some Questions, such as these. "What is it that I am a doing in this World? What am I spending my time and labour in? Am I sure what my End will be? Have I made my self ready for a blessed Eternity? I have been labouring for the things of this World, as if I could never have enough of them; and yet I must shortly dye, and all I have laboured so hard for, will be gone, and I shall carry nothing away with me. I am continually caring for this Body, and making a very Idol of it; my business from morning to night is to feed it, and to adorn it. And am I not a very fool for this? Must not this idolized Body of mine by and by rot in the Earth? And am I taking all this pains to entertain the Worms? Who can dwell with Everlasting Burnings? And what care have I taken that I may not? How stand my Accounts against the day of Judgment? Do I nothing now but what I shall be able to answer for then? Or have I blotted out by repentance all that will not pass then for good? O let what will become of this World, which is but for a moment; and of this Body, which will quickly be all rottenness and putrefaction; my great care, if I be not quite mad, must be, by a holy
"and

“and virtuous life on Earth, to be fitted for an
 “eternal glorious Life in Heaven. My days
 “consume apace, and when my Lamp of Life
 “will be extinguished, I know not. This day
 “is here, but to morrow’s uncertain: ‘Tis there-
 “fore high time for me to live well, that I
 “may live for ever.

6. Consider, as Holy *David* did, *Pf. CXIX*
 50. and as we are often call’d upon to do, our
 own ways. *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Con-*
sider your ways, Hag. I. 5, 7. A man’s ways
are his thoughts, desires, designs, delights, hopes,
confidences, loves, fears, or hatreds; all his
words and actions, callings, professions, customs,
 and in short, his whole *Conversation* privately
 with himself, or abroad in the World. This
 it concerns us much to think upon; not as
 too many do, with delight and pleasure in the
 very thoughts of their Sins, endeavouring thus
 when the act is over, to taste over the pleasure
 again in their thoughts of it, and to continue
 the gust and relish of it as long as they can:
 neither must we consider and contrive in our
 thoughts new ways of sinning; how we may
 get into them, how we may walk on most se-
 curely and most pleasantly in them; or how we
 may compass our worldly, carnal and devillish
 ends by them: this kind of thinking on our
 own ways, is (God knows) too common; and
 many are so perfect in this art of considering
 their own ways, that they can hardly do any
 thing else. But this we are to consider, That

we

we walk by the Rule that God hath given us; that we carefully mind what we do, and how, and to what end we do it; and taking a review of our ways past, examine whether they be such as God approves of. We should be as vigilant over our selves, and have as close an eye to all our doings, as a most wary *Master* or *Mistress* are wont to have over their *Servants*, whose either *skill* or *faithfulness* they most suspect. Every night it would well become us to call our selves to an account for all our doings, and let nothing escape us, if it be possible, without trial. Thus might we discern what our present spiritual state and condition is, and whither the ways we now walk in, will bring us in the end. Would we indeed well consider all our own ways, and observe well whether they be the ways of God, or the ways of the Devil and our own Lusts, and whither they tend, to life or Death; it were to be hoped we should see the World in time reformed, and the ways of Piety and holiness come in request again. But alas! whilst men consider so little what they do, and live so carelessly and negligently as tho their doings in this life had no relation at all to their future state; or as if they had no God to give an account to of what they do; 'tis no wonder that so many run headlong to destruction in the ways which they have chosen, and persist in, without any consideration, what they are, or whither they lead.

S E C T. V.

The CONCLUSION.

HAVING pointed out some few things very considerable, for the help of those who have not been accustomed to this most necessary duty of Consideration; I shall now conclude this Part with an earnest Exhortation to it.

Let us all, as we love God and our own Souls, awaken our selves to this Work. Nothing can be of greater concernment to us, than the things we ought to consider; and therefore we must be every way inexcusable if we do not very seriously consider them. Can it seem all one to us, whether we have a God over us, or none? Is it all one whether we be under his Government, or our own Masters; under his power, or at our own command? Are we no way concern'd in God's Infinite Wisdom, Power, Goodness, Justice, Faithfulness, Holiness, his Providence, or his Laws? Are his Works and Word, his Blessings and his Curse, his Favour and Displeasure, his Mercies and his Judgments, all one to us? Can we be wholly unconcern'd whether he see us, or see us not; whether he regard or neglect us? Can we think it all a case, whether we behave our selves towards him as Subjects, or as Rebels; whether he reward, or punish us? Is it no matter, whether

whether we live like Men, or Beasts ; whether we use our Reason, or not ; whether we do what we were made for, or act contrary to our Nature, and the ends of our Creation ? Is it the same thing, whether we be holy or unholy ; lovely or abominable in the pure Eyes of God ? Can we be indifferent, whether God take any care for our Salvation, or none ? whether we have a Saviour, or no Saviour ; be reconciled to God, or at enmity with him ? Is it all one to us what our End shall be, whether we shall be acquitted, or condemned in the day of Judgment ? whether it shall be then said to us, *Come ye blessed, or depart ye cursed* ? whether we shall for ever rejoice in Heaven, or burn in Hell ? Makes it no matter, whether the time of this life be wisely improved, or vainly wasted ? whether we be fitted in time for mercy, or stay till it be too late ? If none of all these things be of any concernment to us, then are they not worth our thinking on ; neither are we ourselves worthy of our own Thoughts ; and it's no matter what becomes of us, whether we shall be saved, or damned. Nay, 'tis plain, we think not our Souls worth the saving. But if there be any weight in these matters, and if it be not all one to us, whether we be in Glory, or in Torment ; then are these things well worth our serious considering ; and it cannot be all one to us, whether we think much of them, or no. Our meat will not keep us from famishing, or alive, if we do not eat and digest it. No means of Salvation will keep us from perishing,

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if they be not considered. God's Word and Sacraments, his Judgments and Mercies, his Promises and Threatnings; all the Merits of Christ, and all the gracious Invitations of the Gospel, and all the helps of the Ministry, are quite lost unto us without Serious Consideration; and we go to Hell when Heaven is set open to us, for want of considering whither we are going.

How can we possibly excuse our selves for this gross neglect? It is no hard matter for one to think of himself, and his own Concerns. It is natural and unavoidable to us to think of something; and is it not reasonable then to think on something to some purpose? When we cannot hinder our thoughts from being busie, is it not fit we should set them on work for our good? Can we excuse our selves for not thinking most on the best things, which will do us most good? Can our own Consciences acquit us, for not thinking how we may escape Eternal Misery? Can any one pity us, or shall not we curse our selves, if we perish only for want of considering how we may be saved? Are the things which belong unto our Peace hid from us, so that we can have no thoughts of them? Hath not God laid them plain and open before us, so as he that runs may read them? Have we not yet well learn'd them? And can we excuse our selves for such a Sin and Folly? Have we no Teachers to instruct us? Have we no capacity of learning? Have we no Eyes to see with, no light to see by? Are we forgetful? And have we

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we not daily remembrancers of what we are so apt of our selves to forget? Alas! all comes to this at last; We are idle and negligent, we are sturdy and obstinate; we are wicked and perverse; we take no delight in God; we care not for spiritual things. O how shall we then escape for neglecting so great Salvation?

Have we no reason to consider? Are we not in the greatest danger by not considering? May we not be surprised by Death, before we have learn'd to live; by Judgment, before our Accounts be ready; by Hell-fire, before we so much as fear'd it? May we not be tempted out of the way to life, ere we are aware of it, by a thousand temptations for want of considering? May we not fall asleep, and sleep on securely, till all be in flames about us, and there shall be no escaping, nothing but terror and amazement? Good God! that nothing should make us sensible of this danger, who are otherwise so apt to be afraid, even where no fear is! What, will we not be safe at so easie a rate as a little timely thinking of our danger!

What can sweeten and smoothe unto us all the sour, rough, and melancholy passages of this life, and make them in any measure tolerable to us, but Consideration? What is it that can strengthen us either to prevent, or remove, or bear the cross, and all afflicting Accidents; the Losses and Disappointments, the Sickneses and Pains, the Grievs and Vexations of this Life, but Serious Consideration? Such may any Man's

Condition be in this World, that nothing in the World, but the Consideration of his own Integrity, of God's Love, and the Joys of Heaven, can give him the least comfort or ease of mind. His whole refreshment is this, That he is in the right, though it be a rugged way; that he shall shortly be at his Journeys end, and out of this uneasie way, at home in his Father's House, where he shall rest in blessedness for ever. Nothing but this Consideration can keep up his spirits, or prevent his fainting in the way. And shall we not, to make our life easie to us, and our burthen light, be at the pains of a few timely serious thoughts?

Whether we will consider or no, God doth always consider us, and all our ways, and doings, and that in order to an Eternal Reward or Punishment. If God would not regard what we do, we needed the less to consider what we do. Were it all one to God, how we live, and he made no difference between the Sheep and Goats, we should need the less to consider unto which Flock we belong. But we know 'tis otherwise, *He numbers our steps, and watches over our sins; our transgression is seal'd up in a bag, he sows up our iniquity, Job XIV. 16, 17.* Though we consider it not in our hearts, he remembreth all our wickedness; our doings beset us about, they are before his face; *Hof. VII. 2.*

The Devil and his Angels consider us, and watch all opportunities, which our inconsideration makes them in abundance, to take us at unawares,

unawares, and as it were fast asleep. When the Husbandman sleepeth, then is the proper season for the Enemy to sow his Tares. When we are at rest in our minds, secure, and consider little, then is it Satan's opportunity to sow the Seed of Wickedness in our Hearts. We must be on our watch against this devouring Lion, if we would not be devoured by him: and our only Security is Serious Consideration.

O how much Misery would a seasonable considering of things prevent! Misery which will make us at length sadly consider, when it will be too late. Now Consideration will do us much good, then 'twill do us hurt. When 'twill do us good, we will not consider; when 'twill do us hurt, we cannot chuse but consider. O Folly of all Follies! What a madness is this, not to do to our comfort now, what if we do not now, we must do hereafter to our sorrow? What would the Damned in Hell now give, that either they had consider'd when they would not, or could not now consider when they must? Now Consideration would prevent Hell-torments, then it will in a great part make them. Had the Rich Glutton consider'd what he must endure in Hell, he would not have delighted in the way to Hell; thither he came because he consider'd not, that thither he was going; and that being there, no Consideration could bring him back again. Yea, how many severe Judgments might we escape in this life, did we well consider? *These things hast thou*

done (saith God), and I kept silence, thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thy self; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tare you in pieces, and there be none to deliver, Psal. L. 20, 21. What a folly is it to sleep on, 'till God be forced by his Rod to awake us! But what a madness, not to awake when his Rod is upon us, but to sleep on still, till we awake in Everlasting Burnings!

PART II.

THE

SIN and DANGER

Of Delaying

REPENTANCE.

I Hope there hath been enough said in the *former Part* of this Discourse, to convince us of the necessity of *Serious Consideration*; and if *Consideration* be so very necessary, it is to this end, that we may live *well* here, and *happily* hereafter. It appears, by what hath been said, that none but *serious, thinking, and considering* Persons, can live well; and 'tis certain, that none, but they who live well, have any reason to hope, that they can die well, or that they can be happy after death. Therefore was it needful in the *first* place, we should be put in mind of this important Duty, which is so generally neglected, and the neglect whereof draws so great an Evil after it, as that of living only to dishonour God, and to destroy our selves eternally. But now 'tis also as evident from all

that hath been said, that the deepest and most Serious Consideration, even of the best and most considerable things, is but a great deal of trouble to no purpose; and indeed a very idle thing, if it bring us not to a stedfast *resolution*, and a strenuous *endeavour* to behave our selves, throughout the whole course of this Life, so as may best please God, and most conduce to our own Eternal Happiness. *Resolving* is the end of *Considering*; and *Doing* is the perfecting of *Resolution*. Without constant *Practice*, 'tis neither *considering* nor *purposing* that will bring us to *blessedness*. To think much, merely for thinking's sake, is just to as much purpose, as to think of nothing at all; a man may possibly become more *knowing* by it, but he is not one jot the *better*. If then we will improve our Consideration to our advantage, we must take the same course, which, as we have seen before, *David* took; who no sooner had *consider'd*, but forthwith he *turn'd his feet unto God's Testimonies*; yea, he *made haste, and delayed not to keep God's Commandments*. This must be the fruit of our *Consideration*, if we consider to any purpose. As the *Prodigal Son* in the *Parable*, Luk. XV. no sooner *came to himself*, and *consider'd* things well, but straightway he *resolved* to return to his *Father*; and having *resolved*, away he went without delay: so are we to do, if we would be safe and happy, *considering* well, *repent* immediately of all our Sins, and without stop enter upon a new course of life.

And

And this is the business of this *Second Part*, to shew the necessity of a *speedy Repentance*, and the absurdity of *Delaying* it. It is a work that requires all the haste that we can make, and admits of no delay at all. *First*, We cannot repent too soon. *Secondly*, We may defer Repentance till it be too late. These are the two things I shall now make very plain.

S E C T. I.

No man can Repent too soon.

Repentance is a turning from our own Sinful ways into the ways of God's Commandments; out of the way of Death, into the way of Life; it is a *leaving off* to be bad, and a *growing good*: 'tis a *change* of the whole man for the better, both of the inward temper of his heart, and of the outward course of his Life and Conversation. And can it now be needful to prove, that this cannot be done too soon? Can one too early get out of *danger* and be *safe*? Can one too soon begin to grow *Happy*? Need I use arguments to convince us, that one cannot make too much haste to be a *good man*? And yet so strangely bewitch'd and blinded are Sinners, such an almost incredible power hath Satan got over men, to blind their eyes, and darken their minds, that they dote on nothing so much as on their own *foulness* and *deformity*;
and

and nothing is harder to convince them of, than that it is better for them to be *clean* than *filthy*, *well* than *sick*, *good* than *bad*, *wise* than *fools*, *happy* than *miserable*. Who would think, that a *Reasonable Creature* should be so *Senseless*? And yet almost *all* the work, and I am sure, the *hardest part* of that which the *Ministers* of Christ have to do, is to make men sensible of this, *That a man cannot too soon be good*; the thing which I am now to shew, and shew it I can; but to make men see and believe it, is the work of *God alone*; and we must Humbly and Earnestly in Fervent Prayer beseech *Him* to do it; I mean to make us effectually *Sensible* of these three things.

1. *That we cannot too soon do what is at all times our Duty to do.*
2. *That we cannot too soon do what alone can set us in safety.*
3. *That we cannot too soon do that, without which our life is very uncomfortable.*

1. *We cannot too soon do that which is at all times our Duty to do*; and there is no part of our life, how early soever it be, that it is not our duty to Repent in it, and keep the Commandments of God. What we cannot do sooner than it is our Duty to do it, cannot be done too soon; and what it is our Duty always to be doing, cannot be begun too soon. We are
always

always *Sinners*. therefore we cannot *Repent* too soon; because it cannot be sooner than we have *Sins* to be *Repented* of. Were *Repentance* no more, than what too many I fear take it to be, a *being sorry that we have sinned*, it could not be too soon; for so soon as we have *Sinned*, we have cause to be sorry that we have *Sinned*; and we have all *Sinned* even from our *Infancy*: And so soon as we have *Offended God*, it is our *Duty* to be sorry that we have *Offended* him. Were it no more, but a *hatred of Sin*, a *confessing of it*, or *resolving against it*, yea, or any sort of *actual forsaking it*, and *begging God's Pardon for it*; nothing of all this could be done too soon; because it is our *Duty* to do all this so soon as we have *Sinned*; and we have always had *Sins* to be *hated*, *confess'd*, *resolv'd against*, *pardon'd* and *forsaken*. And yet, were this all that is meant by *Repentance*, though we could not but confess it very *reasonable*, that all this should be done so soon as we are sensible that we are *Sinners*; yet I fear we should not think it altogether *necessary*; but would rather flatter our selves, that it would be enough to do it in our last *Sickness*, or some few days or hours before we *die*; because all this, if we have but so much *time*, and so much *sense* and *understanding* left us as to think of it, may then be done; and I doubt not, but it is done by a great many, who yet do not *Repent* unto life, as will be shewn anon. But seeing *Repentance* is all this, and a great deal more than

than all this ; even a *thorough change of life*, not for death, but for a *more Holy life*, and that, not in *Heaven*, but on *Earth* ; seeing it is a *leaving of Sin*, not to do nothing, but to do our *Duty* ; a *turning from our own wicked ways* unto *God's Testimonies*, and the *keeping of his Commandments* ; it is a *Duty* that we are always to be doing so long as we live, and can only be done whilst we live ; and is in great danger not to be done at all if it be not soon begun ; and cannot be done too soon, because the doing of it soon, even so soon as we can, is a part of the *Duty*. To make this plainer, let us *First* briefly consider what the *Duty of Repentance* is, as in the *Holy Scripture* it is described unto us ; and *Secondly*, what time the same *Scripture* directs us to, for the doing of it ; and by both we shall easily perceive, that we cannot repent too soon, because no sooner than it is our *Duty*.

First, Observe how the *Duty of Repentance* is described unto us in the *Holy Scripture*. Ezek. XVIII. 21. *It is a turning from all our sins which we have committed, and a keeping of all God's Statutes, and doing that which is lawful and right.* And v. 31. *A casting away from us all our transgressions, whereby we have transgressed ; and making us a new heart, and a new spirit. It is an amending of our ways and our doings, Jer. VII. 3. A returning every man from his evil way, and making our ways and our doings good, Jer. XVIII.*

11. It implieth a godly sorrow for Sin, yet that godly sorrow is not Repentance; but worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of, 2 Cor. VII. 10. It Implieth a hatred of every false way, Psal. CXIX. 104. A being ashamed, and confounded for our own ways; a loathing our selves in our own sight, for our iniquities, and for our abominations, Ezek. XXXVI. 31, 32. A confessing and forsaking our sins, Prov. XXVIII. 13. And yet all this is not the whole Duty of Repentance. But as we must cease to do evil; so must we learn to do well also, Isa. I. 16, 17. We must both eschew evil, and do good, 1 Pet. III. 11. Neither is this to be thought a work on which it may be enough to bestow some small part of our life when it grows near to an end; for Repentance is thus express'd, Tit. II. 12. A denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. Can we think the Apostle meant no more by these words, but that we should do this for some few years or days of our old age before we die? Certainly no man can be so foolish as to think so; but rather, that even so long as we live in this present World, and whilst we are a looking for that blessed hope mention'd V. 13. that is, so long as we live, we should do this, as Zacharias clearly expresseth it, Luk. I. 75. That we should serve God in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life. And by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, Rom. II. 7. I am confident,

dent, that no body can now imagine, that such a *Repentance* as in these places of Holy Scripture is commended to us, can be the work of a *dying man*, or that it is not work enough for one's *whole life*, how long soever. However 'tis plain, that it is our *Duty* in all the several ages of life, and at all times whilst we live, and therefore no point of our time can be too soon to begin it in; but every moment that we wilfully neglect it, we add to our Sins by leading so long an unholy life, contrary to the Command of God. But this will more fully be proved afterwards.

Secondly, Observe what *time* the same Scripture directs us to for the setting upon this Duty. And we shall hardly find that it commends to us any other *time* but the *present*; there is no *to morrow*, that I know of, allow'd us to depend upon; not the least countenance or encouragement to *procrastination* or driving off to another time. *Therefore now*, saith the Lord, *Turn ye even unto me* Joel II. 12. *Now it is high time to awake out of sleep*, Rom. XIII. 11. *Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation*, 2 Corinth. VI. 2. *To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts*, Heb. III. 7. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth*, Eccl. XII. 1. No part, no day of our Age too soon. We are always call'd upon to repent, *presently to day just now*; and not told we may stay till *to morrow*, or bid to do it sometime *hereafter*. Whenever there-

therefore we are *called to repent*, and that is as soon soever as we are made to *understand* that we are sinners, and that *Repentance* is our duty; then is it our duty to set about it; and to put it off longer is a violation of our duty, and a new sin; and therefore 'tis certain, we can never begin to repent too soon.

2. *We cannot too soon do that, without the doing whereof we can never be in a safe condition*; no man thinks he can make too much haste to be *safe*: And nothing can be plainer than this, That we are never in a *safe condition*, till we be *sincere Penitents*; therefore we cannot repent too soon, unless we can be *safe* too soon. Can any one think he hath too soon got out of the Lion's mouth, out of the snares of the Devil, and from the Borders of Hell? Can any one think it too soon to be with-in view of Heaven and Eternal Joys? Then indeed he may think it too soon to repent of his sins, and walk in the ways of God's Commandments. Did we but really believe, and well consider, That we are always in *danger of Eternal Destruction*, and every moment ready to fall into the bottomless Pit of *Fire and Brimstone*, out of which there is no Redemption, so long as we go on in any of the ways of sin; tho we had no *sense* of our *Obligations* and *Duty* to God, and tho we had no *Love* to him, which should constrain us to do any thing for his sake; and lest we should be wanting in our *Duty* to him; yet one would think

think the apprehension of the *danger* we are in of *perishing*, should make us *afraid* to go on, and *fear* should constrain us, for our own sakes, to change our course of life, lest we should be wanting to *our selves* and our own *safety*. Our Blessed JESUS, who came to *save* us from Death and Destruction, came to call us to *Repentance*, that we may be saved; that being the only door that God, for his sake, hath opened unto us to *Salvation*. He himself it was that said, *Except ye repent, ye shall all perish*, Luke XIII. 3. And when St. John the Baptist saw the *Pharisees* and *Sadducees* coming to his *Baptism*, which was the *Baptism of Repentance*, he thus saluted them, *O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance*, Mat. III. 7, 8. Shewing them, That there is no other way of escaping the Wrath of God which always burneth against sin and wickedness, but such a *Repentance* as brings forth the *Fruits of Righteousness*. Till we unfeignedly Repent of our sins, we are in a state of sin; and so long are we the *children of wrath*, Eph. II. 3. *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness*, Rom. I. 18. Whilst we know what is our Duty to God, and yet do it not, there are many stripes ready for us; and God hath declared both by many Threatnings, and by many Examples of his just Indignation, that his Wrath is kindled against us.

us. God spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing the flood upon the world of the ungodly. And turning the Cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly, 2 Pet. II. 5, 6. They suffering the vengeance of eternal fire, Jude 7. What safety can the impenitent Sinner promise himself, or whither will he fly, and take Sanctuary from the Fiery Indignation of provoked Justice and Omnipotence? Whilst we presumptuously continue in our sins, we heap up wrath against the day of wrath, Rom. II. Our Sins cry aloud to the Almighty, for his Vengeance upon us. His Judgments hang over our heads, like the naked Sword over the head of the Tyrant, by a single hair of Mercy; and if our sins once break that, we are suddenly cut off from the land of the living. God will wound the hairy scalp of such a one as goeth on still in his trespasses, Psal. LXVIII. 21. For God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath prepared for him the instrument of death, Psal. VII. 11, 12, 13. God hath made all things ready for the execution of his Wrath whensoever it pleaseth him; and no sinner knoweth how soon God will smite him down to Hell. If he stay yet a while longer, it is to give us time to repent; and if we repent not ere long, he is the mean while but whetting his Sword, and bending his Bow to

its full bent, that whenever he pleaseth to take his own time for it, his Sword may pierce deep, and his Arrow flye home, and wound mortally. Indeed he hath declared himself to be very *gracious*, and *slow to wrath*; and our own daily experience assures us that he is so; and this wicked use we are too apt to make of it, That by his *long-suffering* and *forbearance* we embolden our selves to sin the longer, and to delay our Repentance, in hope of longer forbearance still. Yea, *Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil*, Eccles. VIII. 11. A strange and most unreasonable presumption this! as tho a man could be the safer, the longer he abused God's Patience, and turn'd his Grace into wantonness, and even dared him to do his worst. Oh that we would consider how unadvisedly we act for our selves! how ill we consult for our own *safety*! and what Fools we are to think we can be *safe*, whilst we are provoking God by our Sins, and by this Sin especially, of presuming he will yet forbear us longer, because he hath forbore much longer already than we deserv'd. Not considering the *goodness of God* in his *forbearance* and *long-suffering*, which should lead us to repentance; after our hardness and impenitent hearts, we treasure up unto our selves wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, Rom. II. 5. How foolishly secure soever we may be in our
sinful

sinful courses, yet certain it is, we are never *safe*. *Jonas* may *sleep*, and fear nothing, but the Wind and Seas are not quiet for all that while; and he is in no less *danger* because he thinks not of it. Whilst we sin, God's Anger is pursuing us, and we know not how soon it will overtake us. Seeing therefore we are never *safe* till we repent, we cannot repent too soon, unless it can be too soon to be *safe*.

3. *We cannot too soon do that, without which our life can never be comfortable to us. Comfort is the very life of life; and a life without Comfort, is worse than death. And truly a life of sin is a life without any true Comfort at all; and false Comfort is not worth the having, unless it can be worth ones while to go laughing into the Fire of Hell, which never shall be quenched: We cannot therefore too soon repent, except we can think it too soon to lead a comfortable life; And that the impenitent sinner can have no true Comfort, is plain enough from what was last consider'd, That he can have no safety; for certainly an unsafe condition is also a very uncomfortable condition; and I know not what can comfort him that sees himself every moment in greatest danger of perishing everlastingly. What, Can there be any place for Comfort in that man's breast, that knows himself to be at Enmity with God, and God to be incens'd against him? Can he find Comfort, who walks wherever he goes under*

a full-charg'd Cloud of *Vengeance*, ready whenever God gives the word, to break upon his head? Can there be any *Comfort* in a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries? And yet this is all he hath any reason to look for, who sins wilfully after he hath received the knowledge of the truth, and holds on without *Repentance*, Heb. X. 26, 27. Indeed we see it too often, That the most abominable Sinners can so *harden* themselves in Sin, that they grow *insensible* of their *danger*: And not only so, but they can find much *Pleasure* too (such as it is) in serving their lusts; nay, and whilst they do so, can flatter themselves with a foolish conceit that all's well enough with them. And just so may a man in a *swoon*, or in any *stupifying Disease*, be *insensible* that he is in danger of death; and a man in his *sleep* may not perceive that the House over his head is on fire: Yea, he may have many *pleasant Dreams* in the midst of his danger; and a *Mad man* may take pleasure in his *madness*, and yet he's as mad as he that thinks such a *Pleasure* to be a *Comfort*. Such a *comfort* may an *impenitent Sinner* have in his wicked life, whilst his sins keep him too busie to think of his danger. But whenever he shall begin to think seriously, (which such a one is very unwilling to do, and which unwillingness of his is a manifest sign that he can find nothing *Comfortable* in his present state, else would he be more willing to think

think of it) he will find his pleasure quickly vanish. Let him apprehend himself in present danger of *dying*, and let him think whither *Death* is about to convey him, and what he can plead if he shall be called to the great *Judgment*; and then even his *uncertainty* of what shall become of him, or what he shall find in another World, will soon detect the vanity of all his present *Comforts*. But now on the other side, how sweet and pleasant are the thoughts of that happy person, who hath repented unfeignedly of his Sins, and walks before God in the ways of his Commandments with a perfect heart! He lives in a constant *friendship* with the *Father of mercies*, and *God of all consolation*; with the *Blessed J E S U S* in whom he is reconciled unto the *Father*: and who hath said unto his Disciples, *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you*, John XV. 14. Hence was *Abraham* called the *friend of God*, Jam. II. 23. Now saith *Christ*, *I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid*, Luke XII. 4. This is the *penitent man's comfort*, he is at peace with God, and there is no condemnation to them that walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit, Rom. VIII. 1. Yea, he hath this comfortable Promise, v. 28. *All things work together for his good*. Were there no more in it but this, That the *Penitent* is freed from the fear of *Eternal Punishment*, and that his Sins are forgiven; that he is free from the stings and smartings of a guilty Conscience, which is now purified and healed;

certainly this alone is so great a *comfort*, that no man of any sense can think he can get too soon into such a condition. Is it not an exceeding *comfortable* thing to a man, that he can go about his honest *business*, or lawful *refreshments*; and quietly, after all, betake himself to his *rest*, without the angry rebukes of his own Conscience, and without any dreadful apprehensions of God's being displeased with him? Is it not very *comfortable* to be confident of God's *love* and *favour*, of his fatherly *blessing*, and of his special *care and providence*? Is it not very *comfortable* to be able in the *Psalmist's* words, *Psal.* IV. 8. to say after all the hard labours and troubles of the day past, *I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.* Let it thunder and lighten, let the winds blow, and the waves beat, let all the World be in tumult and confusion, the *Penitent* is got into his safe Harbour, his strong Tower, his inviolable Sanctuary. Let mens Tongues be whetted like Swords, let the Devil and his suborned Tools bring thousands of *Calumnies* and false *Accusations*; his own *Conscience* still acquits him, and *his rejoicing is this, the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity he hath had his conversation in the world,* 2 *Cor.* I. 12. Let dangers and Enemies encompass him round about on all sides, his God is his Protector; and *who, saith he, can hurt me, if I be a follower of that which is good?* 1 *Pet.* III. 13. *Nothing can separate me*
from

from the love of God which is in CHRIST JESUS my Lord, Rom. VIII. 39. Finally; So long as he lives, he can rejoice in hope of the glory of God; yea, and glory in tribulation also, Rom. V. 2, 3. And when he comes to dye, he can without any disturbance take leave of this World, and triumph over Death; saying, O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? Blessed be God who hath given us the victory through JESUS CHRIST our Lord, 1 Cor. XV. 55, 57. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, 2 Tim. IV. 7, 8. Is it now possible that any one can make too much haste to get into this comfortable Condition? No man that considereth aright his Duty, his Safety, or his Comfort, can think it at any time too soon to repent.

SECT. V.

The Sin of DELAY.

THough it can never be too soon for a Sinner to repent of his sinful course of life; yet I dare not say that it can never be too late; a man therefore cannot make too much haste, because he knows not whether any other time after this, will not be too late; and because the longer he delays it, the more cause he hath still

to fear that it will be so. Indeed every *delaying* of this Duty is sinful; and therefore look how long it is *delay'd*, so much always in *one sense* it is too late; because it was not *so soon* as it ought to have been, or not *soon enough* to prevent a Sin. It hath been already proved, that it cannot be done *sooner* than it is our duty to do it; because it is our duty *at all times*, and we ought always to be doing it: and therefore, if it be *delay'd* at all, we do it later than in duty we were bound to do; and that's *too late* in respect to God's Command. It hath also been proved, That it cannot be done *sooner* than it is our *interest* and *near concern* to do it; because we can never be *safe*, nor enjoy any true *comfort* till it be done; and therefore again, if it be *delay'd* at all, it comes *later* than we stood in need of it, and that's *too late* in respect to our own welfare. God, all the time we *delay* it, wants his right, the honour due unto him; and we all the while lose much good, our safety and comfort; and so in both respects it is *too late*, if it be at all *delay'd*. But now, it may be *too late* too (I will not say in a *worse*, but to us) in a *sadder sense*; that is, we may drive it off so long, that it will be *too late* to repent at all, and till there be neither time nor power left us to repent; and what will become of us then? How long any one may delay his Repentance before it be too late in this sense, no man living can tell him: And therefore whoso is wise, will not delay his Repentance

at all. Of this I shall say more afterwards : at present, I shall endeavour to make us all a little more sensible of the *sinfulness* of *delaying*, and driving off our Repentance, and the keeping of God's Commandments, from day to day ; how contrary it is to all *Scripture* and *Reason*.

And truly this *delay* is so contrary to both these, that it seems very wonderful, how any one should not be *ashamed*, as well as *afraid* to use it. There can be nothing in the World more *absurd*, than for man at once to profess he believes the *Gospel*, and owns the duty of *Repentance* as necessary ; and to *delay* this duty : for this *delay* seems no less than a bold attempt to cancel and blot out the whole *Gospel* at one dash, and to change the order and method which God hath prescribed for the bringing of Sinners to Salvation, for a new one of our own contriving. It seems, I say, the making of a *new Gospel* for our selves, and a new way to Blessedness, which God never approved of, nor allow'd. And is not this as *absurd*, as to set our selves in our Saviour's stead, and a taking upon us to make for our selves a *new* and *easier* way to Heaven ?

That I may not seem to say this without good reason, let it seriously be considered ; That *Repentance* is not only a *duty*, but the special *privilege* of the Gospel. The good news which the *Angels* brought from Heaven was, That God had sent us the *Saviour*, whom he had in
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the beginning promised to Sinners; and the good News that our *Saviour* brought us, was, That God would for his sake accept of the Sinner's *Repentance*, and *Faith* in him. And this was blessed Tidings indeed to a sinful World; told (tis true) before in the *Old Testament*, and shadow'd forth in the *Law*; but now most fully *declared*, and gloriously *confirm'd* by JESUS CHRIST in the *New Testament*.

The *Law of Innocence*, and *Covenant of Works* made with *Adam*, allow'd of no such thing as *Repentance*. All it said was this, *Do this, and live; do it not, and dye. In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely dye*, Gen. II. 17. The first breaking of the *Law*, was death. There could be no safe delaying to keep it, because every delay of keeping it, was a breaking of it; for it was a not doing of the *Commandment*, and that was death. And it must be kept from *first to last*; for every ceasing to do what was commanded, was a not doing of what was commanded; and to this *death* was threaten'd. No *repentance* therefore could have place under this *Covenant*. It was the *New Covenant of Grace* that made way for *Repentance*; and this is the *Gospel-grace*, That Sinners who have broken God's *Law*, and for that are by the Sentence of the *Law* doom'd to *die*, shall yet, if they *repent*, find mercy with God through JESUS CHRIST. This is the *Gospel*, which the *Apostle* saith *was preached before to Abraham*, Gal. III. 8. and therefore was before

fore the *Law* of *Moses*, so long, that it was first preach'd by God in that gracious Promise of the seed of the woman, Gen. III. 15. If *Repentance* had not been allow'd of from the first man's sinning, even all along to the coming of our *Saviour* into the World, as well as after his coming; then had all men, during that long tract of time, for about four thousand years, perished in their sins. But to prevent this, it pleased God, that so soon as the *Law* was broken, the *Gospel* should be preach'd; that men might *believe*, and *repent*, and be *saved*. In a most astonishing condescension to the weakness of Sinners, he mitigated the rigor of the *Law*, and was pleas'd to accept henceforward of a *sincere Obedience* to it, instead of a *perfect fulfilling* of it. Heartily a man must endeavour to do the whole will of God; and whatever failings he finds in himself, he must as heartily *repent* of them, and *believe* that God for *CHRIST* his sake, will not only *forgive* him his repented failings, but also *reward* his sincere Obedience with Eternal Life. This is the *Grace* of the *Gospel*; but this admits of no *delay* of our *sincere obedience*, or of our *repentance*: but makes it our duty every day *sincerely to obey*, and *unfeignedly to repent*; and he that doth not so, daily sinneth against the *Gospel of Grace*; and he that hopeth for Salvation whilst he thus daily sinneth against the *Gospel of Grace*, must needs frame to himself in his imagination some other *Gospel* than that which

which *Christ* hath preach'd, as the foundation of his Hope. The Gospel of *Christ* gives no man leave to continue one moment in sin and impenitence. It shews an easier way to Heaven than the Law did; and assures us of pardon and salvation upon our *repentance*, which the Law did not: but it hath not left Sin to be any part of our way to Heaven, nor assured any one that *delayeth* to repent, that he shall ever come thither.

Our Blessed *Saviour* came not to call Sinners *immediately* to Heaven, or to assure them of Blessedness, whether they lead a life of *repentance* or no, but he came to call sinners to *repentance*, Matt. IX. 13, and so to put them into the new way to life, which was opened unto them through him. His Forerunner, *John the Baptist*; he sent before to prepare his way, by his Preaching and *Baptism*. The substance of whose Preaching was this, *The kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the Gospel*, Mar. I. 15. *He preached the Baptism of Repentance for the remission of sins*, v. 4. And the first preaching of our Holy *JESUS* was to the same purpose. *He began to preach, and to say, Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand*, Matth. IV. 17. And sending out the Twelve to preach, we find the Business they were sent about, was the very same, Mar. VI. 12. *They went out and preached, that men should repent*. For this was God's will, *That Repentance and remission of sins should be preach'd in Christ's name among all Nations*, Luke XXIV. 47. When
St. Pe-

St. Peter's Auditors were moved with his Discourse on the day of *Pentecost*, and began to be inquisitive what course to take for themselves; he thus directs them, *Acts II. 38. Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.* Now what doth all this signify, but that as many Sinners, as hearing this comfortable *Gospel*, believe it, and are thereupon willing to leave their former sinful course of life, and to bind themselves in a new Covenant by *Baptism*, to live a *holy life* in all *sincerity* and *uprightness* of heart, always as they find themselves failing, *repenting* of their faults, and endeavouring to do better, shall, through the Merits of *Christ*, in whom they have believed, be pardon'd and saved? That therefore which the *Gospel* calls, and admits us to, is a *state of Repentance*, whereinto we enter by *Baptism*. Adult persons, already come to the use of Reason, must *repent*; that is, bid adieu to their old wicked way of life, and resolve upon a new and holy one, before they be *baptized*. And *Christian Infants* by *Baptism* covenant to lead a life of *repentance* when they come to understanding. And none are to *delay* this wilfully, but always as they are able to understand the state whereunto they are called, and wherein they are engaged, to make good their part of the *new Covenant*; which is to live in sincere obedience to *Christ*, and always to *repent* of their failings, as they are able to discover them. Thus he that believeth,

lieveth, and is baptized, shall be saved, Mark XVI. 16. How! Shall he be saved, though he live as long as he will in his Sins after he is *baptized*! No; but if he die after *Baptism* before any actual sin, and in a purpose not to commit any such, he shall be saved; and if he do commit sin afterward, and speedily repent of it, not wilfully continuing therein, he shall be saved: But if he wilfully continue in his Sins which in *Baptism* he renounced, 'tis no-where told him that shall be saved. *Baptism saveth us* (saith the Apostle, *1 Pet. I. 3, 21.*) But then he saith too, *'Tis not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good Conscience towards God.* If our Consciences, being examined, can answer us truly, that we covenanted *sincerely*, and keep covenant *faithfully*, *Baptism saveth us.* But what was it we promised? To *repent*, and begin to live an holy life at *such or such* an Age; or when we grow *old*, and are going to *dye*; or after we have had our *fill* of sinning, some time or other when we shall think it most *convenient*? Was it not this we promised, *To keep God's holy will and commandments all the days of our life*? Was it not this Charge that *Christ* gave his *Apostles*, when he gave them Authority and Command to baptize; *Teach them to observe all things that I have commanded you*? *Matth. XXVIII. 20.* What, for some few days of their life, or for the whole remaining part of it? *St. Paul* shall answer this Question, *Rom. VI. 2. Shall we* (saith

(saith he) *that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?* What means he by saying, *We are dead to sin?* Is it not, that we are by our *Baptism* engaged to live in Sin no longer? Know ye not (saith he again) *that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death?* v. 3. And what will follow thence? This is that which he tells us, v. 4. *Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.* And then he adds, v. 6. *Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroy'd, that henceforth we should not serve sin.* Henceforth we are not to let sin reign in our mortal bodies, that we should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither to yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but to yield our selves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and our members as instruments of righteousness unto God, v. 12, 13. Henceforth then, that is, from the time that we are called to repentance by the Gospel, and are baptized into Christ, we are to lead a life (as St. Paul saith, Eph. IV. 1.) worthy of the vocation wherewith we are call'd: and that's a life of sincere Obedience, and unfeigned Repentance. To sin at all, is a transgression of the Law, and that's mortal in it self; but that the Gospel comes in to our succour, and gives us the privilege of Repentance; If then we delay our Repentance, so graciously

ciously indulged unto us, we sin against the mercy of the *Gospel*, as well as against the *righteousness* of the *Law*; we reject our *Pardon*, most lovingly tender'd unto us, by our unwillingness to comply with the *Terms* on which it is offer'd us: and if we be sick unto death, and will not in time apply the *only remedy* provided for us in our otherwise desperate case, what can we expect but to dye? and what pity can we deserve if we die?

And yet too many are apt enough to encourage themselves, to hold out still longer against all Calls and Invitations to a speedy Repentance, upon the most deceitful grounds imaginable: Because they read in the Prophet, *Ezek. XVIII. 27. When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.* And because many have lived a long time very wickedly, and yet have been converted at length, and accepted of God upon their *conversion* and *repentance*; they are apt to think it no such ill thing, as they are told it is, to *delay* their *Repentance* a-while longer; and therefore venture on it, in hopes they may be accepted hereafter, as well as others have been.

Now for men to flatter themselves thus upon so very slender grounds, is so very foolish a thing, that one who considers not how much the love men have to Sin, is become too hard for their reason to answer, how weakly soever
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it plead for it self; would exceedingly wonder how any reasonable creature should be guilty of it. It is indeed very true (and God's Holy Name be for ever blessed for it) that God will accept of the *true Repentance* of great Sinners, who have lain long in their Sins without *Repentance*; and this is a good reason why one that hath continued long in Sin, should not despair; but if he yet Repent, he may hope to be Saved: But is it therefore as good a reason why he should *delay* his *Repentance*, in hopes to Repent hereafter? I have not yet said, that no man who hath been long an *Impenitent Sinner*, can never *Repent*, or shall not be pardon'd if he *Repent*; tho I am in doubt, whether or no a Sinner that Repents not till he come to die, can have a pardon upon so *late* a *Repentance*. But that which I have said is this, That all *delay of Repentance* is exceedingly sinful; and therefore nothing ought to be pleaded for it; no man should dare to encourage himself in it. It is a Sin against the *Gospel of Christ*, which is the only foundation Sinners have to raise their hope of *Salvation* upon. 'Tis, I think, beyond all dispute, that though the *Gospel of Christ* assure *Salvation* to the *Penitent*, yet it hath not assured *Repentance* to him who *delayeth* it. It calleth Sinners to *Repentance* without exception, whether they have been so a longer or a shorter time, and promiseth acceptance; but doth it allow them to take what time they please for it after they are called? Doth it tell them, that

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they may safely stay as long as they have a mind to Sin, and yet repent at last? Neither *Ezekiel*, nor any other *Prophet*, no nor *Apostle*, hath left us one syllable in the *Holy Scripture* to encourage *Delay*; though they have left much to encourage him that hath long delayed to *Repent*. To do the *former* were to encourage men to Sin. To do the *latter*, is to encourage them to give over Sinning, tho it be late. The *former* were to allow men to Sin that Grace may abound, which the *Apostle* abhors, *Rom. VI. 1.* The *latter* is but to dehort men from continuing in Sin through despair of Mercy. In short, though an old Sinner may *Repent*, yet was it his Sin to stay till he was old; and he hath that Sin, as well as others, to Repent of; and no *Scripture* encourageth him to grow *Older* in Sin before he *Repent*, or to take what day he pleaseth for it before his Death, or to hope he shall ever *Repent* at all if he do it not *now*. We are call'd immediately to put off the old man, and to put on the new, *Eph. IV. 24.* I need say no more, but that he who delays his *Repentance*, imagining that to *Repent afterwards* will be enough, must needs account an *Holy life* a needless thing; as though that were not the principal thing that God requires, but it would satisfie him if a man *died well*, how ill soever he had *lived*; when on the contrary, God hath often Commanded us to *live well*; and indeed all his Commands are to that purpose; but hath never commanded us to *die well*; and reason good, for there is no other way
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to *die well*, but to *live well*; and as little danger that he who *lives well*, should not *die well*. Alas! To what purpose was a great part of the *Scripture* written, containing so many rules of *Holy living*, if one may *delay to live holily* as long as he will? Had it not been enough to have told us thus: *Tou that are Sinners must be sure one time or other to Repent that you have been so.* Tho it be your duty to *live an holy life*, yet you need not make all the *haste* you can to do it; only you must take heed of this, That you *die* not before you have *Repented* that you have *lived wickedly*. A man that understands any thing of *God*, or of the *Gospel of Christ*, would tremble to hear such a sense as this put upon it; and yet no better doth he use it, that *delays his Repentance in hopes of Repenting* time enough hereafter. And yet after all, would the *Gospel* bear such a sense as this, it would not excuse the *delaying Sinner's* either *Sin* or *Folly*: For were he sure that a *late Repentance* would be accepted; yet he cannot be sure that he shall *live long enough to Repent*, if he delay it never so little; and 'tis a *foolish* thing to venture all upon an uncertainty: And though he could be sure of this, yet would it still shew the greatest *baseness of Spirit*, and the meanest sense of *God*, and of all those *Obligations of Duty and Gratitude* which he hath laid upon us, that a man can have; both which I shall endeavour to make very plain in these following *Periods*.

S E C T. III.

The Baseness of Delay.

TO Delay our *Repentance* and our keeping of God's Commandments, is an exceeding *base*, *unworthy*, and *shameful* thing; and such as I am confident when any one thoroughly considers, he cannot without *blushing*, and great *indignation* at himself, think he should be guilty of it. I know we are all witty enough to invent excuses for our *folly*, and to find covers for our *Nakedness*, and something or other we have always at hand to hide our *filthiness* and *vileness*. But we are not the less *fools* for being so *wise* as to *deceive* our selves; and when we once have the wit to consider what we do, we shall be *ashamed* of it. When we have said all we can for our selves, our *Consciences* (if ever they awake) will tell us, that we have no regard either to the *dignity* of our own *Nature*, as we are *Men*; nor to the *good* of *others*, as we are *Neighbours* and *Brethren*; nor to the *Honour* of *God*, as we are his *rational creatures*, whilst we *delay* our *repentance*; but that all our delight is to live like *beasts*, and all that we value is *earthly* and *vile*, and all our care is how to feed our *Swinish lusts*, and to humour *corruption*; and can a man perceive this to be his own temper, and not be *ashamed* of himself? Yea, can

can any one chuse but see, that what he doth must needs be altogether as *odious* and *abominable* to God, as it is *base* and *reproachful* to himself?

In the *first* place; How shall a man be able to pardon himself for dealing so basely with his own Soul, as for a great part of his life not to allow it the benefit of its *Reason*; but to enslave it to the Tyranny of the *Flesh*? How shall he be reconciled to himself for dishonouring his own *nature*, and esteeming of it so vilely, as tho it had no pre-eminence above that of the meanest *Animals*? All the while that we *delay* our *Repentance*, we chuse for our selves a condition below the worst condition that any of *them* can be in, a state of *Sin* and *Enmity* with God, wherein not the vilest of them ever are or can be. How sensible are we in the mean time of the *Dignity* of our *Nature*, as we are *Men*? How can we chuse but blush to continue any time so very unlike to that which God at first made *Man* to be? We cannot chuse but know what filthy leprous creatures sin hath made us: And why are we in no more haste to be cleansed and made whole? Why are we no more ambitious to retrieve the *Honour* and *Glory* which by sin we have lost? When God himself, to shew the value of our *Humane Nature*, was pleas'd to send his own *Eternal Son* to take it upon himself; and he who was ever God, was not ashamed to be found in fashion as a man, what a *baseness* is it in us to defile that same *Nature* in the drudgeries of sin, which God thought not unworthy of a

Personal Union with the Divine Nature in his only begotten Son? What's the reason we should delay to have Christ formed in us, to be made Partakers of a Divine Nature in Holiness? Doth not God in J E S U S Christ most graciously invite us to this high honour? Hath he not opened unto us a fountain for sin and for uncleanness, wherein the foulest sinner may wash freely, and become as white as snow? What a vile degeneracy is this that we are sunk into, That we should fall so deeply in love with our own dishonour, as to be loth to part with it? We love our Sickness more than our Health; our Filthiness, more than Purity; our Weakness, more than Strength; our Deformity, more than Beauty; our Chains of Slavery to the Devil, more than the Liberty of the Children of God. We had rather obey our Passions than our Reason, and live like Beasts than like Men; be Earthly than Heavenly, Carnal than Spiritual, like Devils than like Angels, yea, than like God. What else can be the reason why we should delay one minute to keep God's Commandments? Do not they all visibly tend to our Health, and our Honour, and our Happiness? Is it not the design of them all to make us Wise and Good, and every way perfect in our Nature, and like unto God in Holiness; the Brethren of Christ, and Children of God, and Heirs to the glorious Inheritance of the Saints in Light? Why then make we no more haste to keep them, and to enter into this most Honourable and Blessed Condition? Can it be

be for any other reason, but that we love to be as we are ; and take more pleasure in our wretched *Slavery*, and loathsome *Corruption*, than in all that *Blessedness* and *Glory* which God so freely offers to restore us to ? And truly if we be thus madly in love with our own *Shame* and *Wretchedness*, it must needs be very just with God to leave us in them, and never once more to make us those tenders of *Mercy* which we cannot yet find in our hearts to thank him for, or to count worth our acceptance. Suppose a very poor Beggar were very kindly invited by some extraordinary charitable Person of a great Estate, to throw away his nasty Rags, and to accept of a Rich Suit instead of them ; and to leave off his wandering Trade, and come and live in his Family ; with a farther Promise and Assurance, That he should be Heir to a goodly Inheritance ; and the Beggar should give him no other answer but this ; *I thank you, Sir, with all my heart, and I will do as you would have me ; but I will take my own time for it : I love these Rags exceedingly ; and I cannot part with them yet ; and I am so accusom'd to wander, that I cannot yet endure to be confin'd, tho it were to a Palace : But some time or other I will accept of your kindness ; when these Rags will hang about me no longer, and when I am so old or lame that I can wander no more, I will come to your house, and expect to have your good Apparel and Estate.* Or suppose some leprous creature should meet with a charitable Physician, who should very kindly desire him to

accept of his help, promising perfectly to cure him; and this filthy wretch should reply, *Sir, I very heartily and thankfully accept of your kindness, and am resolved to make use of it whenever I think fit; but I have a great mind to be leprous a while longer; it's so pleasing a thing to scratch the foul skin of mine, that I cannot endure to think of being well just now; but whenever I shall grow weary of this filthy disease, at least when I am almost kill'd with it, and afraid to dye, I will call for you, and you shall heal me.* I think there's no body that would say such persons deserv'd to have such kindnesses offer'd them any more; but that they were right serv'd, if they were left to perish by their own base folly. How then shall we think our *Blessed Jesus*, who hath tendred us greater kindnesses than these in our far greater necessities, will resent our *Baseness in Delaying* to accept of his Love, whilst we have as little to plead for our Delay, as these Wretches had? Indeed we need not guess at this; for himself hath told us, in the *Parable of the Feast*, *Luke XIV.* 'Tis God himself that is represented there by the *certain man that made a great supper, and bade many*; 'tis he, I say, that graciously condescends to bid sinners to a Feast of fat things; but alas! one hath a *piece of ground* to go see, and another hath his *Oxen* to prove, and another hath a *new-married Wife* to cherish; and for these reasons they cannot come when they are bidden; Well, they may stay away then for ever; for so saith God, *v. 24. None of those men that were bidden,*
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shall taste of my supper. If we will be so *base* as to delight in filthiness, why should not God with Indignation say, Let them be filthy still?

Secondly, Whosoever delayeth his Repentance, behaveth himself as basely in reference to others, as to himself; and shews very plainly, That he cares not what becomes of the whole World, so he might be left freely to enjoy his sins without any disturbance. Can any man that professeth Religion, be ignorant, That it is the breaking of God's Commandments that brings upon the world of mankind all the evils it at any time laboureth under? All the *Troubles* and *Disturbances* which men have one from another, and all the terrible *Judgments* of God which light upon whole *Kingdoms, Towns, and Families*, are owing to mens continuance in their sins, and *delaying their Repentance.* He's not only too great a stranger to the Word of God, but a man of very little experience or observation, that understands not this. And truly he that understands it, and *delayeth his Repentance,* declareth himself thereby too *base* to make a Member of Humane Society; and the world may well be both *ashamed* and *afraid* to afford him entertainment any longer. The very *Rabble* could hardly be too much enraged, or vent its fury too freely on so unnatural a wretch as chuseth rather to continue one of them for whom, and by whom a *Nation* is in continual danger of being destroy'd, than to be one of those *few Righteous Persons* for

for whose sake God often spareth a very wicked Generation. Would we not account that man one of the worst-natur'd men in the world, and fit to be trampled down to dirt by all that met him, who should be so malignantly bent against the welfare of mankind, and bear such a spite against all men, that rather than the world should want some noisome Vermine, and poisonous Creatures to molest and hurt it, would be content himself to be turn'd into a venomous *Toad* or *Viper*? And yet, when we well consider things, how much worse than either of these, and how much more mischievous in all kinds, is that man who *delayeth* his *Repentance*; and by his wilful continuance in sin, not only disordereth the world, and makes it a very uneasy and dangerous place to live in, but provokes God daily to pour down Fire from Heaven on the Neighbourhood wherein he is suffer'd to live and do wickedly? What Punishment could be too great for that man, who being sick of the *Plague*, and assured of his Cure if he would stay within doors, and be ordered by his *Physician*, will not hearken to any Advice in order to his Health, unless he may be allowed first to run abroad to and fro infecting all the Country as far as his strength will carry him? And how much worse than this doth he who will not accept of the cure of his sins till he have had time enough to fulfil all his lusts, and to corrupt all his Neighbours, and make all about him, as much as in him lieth, fit objects of God's just Wrath and Indig-

Indignation? This is all the respect that the *delaying Sinner* hath to the *good of mankind*, that rather than want the vile Pleasures of Sin, as long as he is able to serve his Lusts, he is resolv'd never to regard what Evils any number of men fall under and endure. And what greater *baseness* of mind and temper can there be in any one than this?

Yes, *Lastly*, The *delaying Sinner* is come to a degree of *baseness* far exceeding all that hath yet been said of him. For by his *delaying* to keep God's *Commandments*, he declares, that he hath as little sense of God's *Honour*, and of his own manifold *Obligations* to God, as of his own primitive *Dignity*, or of the *Worlds Happiness*. To *delay our Repentance*, after that God hath been graciously pleased, in the greatest wonder of mercy, by his only beloved *Son* to call us to it, and by him to open unto us a new Door to *Salvation* after that Sin had wall'd up the old one against us; what less can this be than, as they are said to do in the Parable, *Matth. XXII. 5.* to *set light* by the Gospel of Peace? What is it, but to slight all God's gracious tenders of *Peace* and *Reconciliation*, as things we think as yet *needless*, and not at all to be *valued*? To puff at the *goodness* and loving *Invitations* of God, and to turn scornfully away from his Call, whilst he beseecheth us to *return* unto him and be saved: one of us preferring his *Farm*, another his *Merchandise* before the *Kingdom of God*? We cannot but be sensible, how great a *baseness* it is to deal, as
delaying

delaying Sinners do, with Almighty God, when we shall have well consider'd the *condition* wherein his *Mercy* overtakes us. We cannot but confess, that as his *Creatures* we are *naturally* obliged to be entirely obedient to his Will in all things: and that as *Sinners* who have disobey'd his will, he may justly punish us as he pleaseth. And we know, that for Sin we all lie under the *curse* of Death, and 'tis *justice* in God to *execute* the *Sentence* of Death upon us at any time when he thinks it fit. But instead of doing so, he is pleased in much goodness to offer us a *Pardon*, and that upon such *terms* as, had all been left to our own choice, we our selves could not reasonably have desired easier; though one would think no terms of *Salvation* should seem hard to those who were under a *condemnation* to Eternal Torments. All that our good God requireth of us, is but to *repent* of our sins, and to come in at the hearing of his gracious *Proclamation*, and to submit our selves to the *Government* of that Blessed *Saviour* who in his love hath provided for us; and to conclude our selves safe whilst we continue under his Conduct. And this is it that the *delaying Sinner* thinks it not yet time to accept of. Now if any of us be of this mind, pray let us well consider what it is that we do. Our *offended* God is willing not only to *pardon* us, and rid us of the *fear* and *danger* of Eternal Misery; but also to *reward* us with Eternal Blessedness, on condition that we will come in at his Call, and take the easie Yoke and light Burthen

then of JESUS CHRIST upon us: but we will not yet. Is not this then as much as to say thus unto God -- Good God be content, and have patience a-while longer, *there's no such haste.* Thou mayst be sure we have no mind to perish, and therefore need'st not to question it, but one time or other, before we die, we will come and accept of thy kindness. Be not then so hasty with us, but let us alone a-while to mind our own business that we have set our selves to do; and think it time enough if we hearken to thy Call when we shall be a little more at leisure. The World calls us, and our Lusts call us, and we cannot do all things at once; these must be serv'd in the first place; and when we have done what we can for them, we will serve thee. Let us now consider, what we would think of those men whom we should overhear uttering such words as these to God with their mouth. And then consider again, whether this must not be the secret Language of every one's heart that wilfully delayeth to repent, and keep God's Commandments. I know there may be many Causes of mens putting off and neglecting their duty to God. Some of us are either so ignorant, or so regardless of God, and of all things that shall be after this Life, that they never think to any purpose, or seriously, and concernedly, of any such thing: and we must needs confess this to be a most horrid indignity offer'd to God, as well as a most stupid senselessness of our own good or evil. Some may have foolishly persuaded themselves, either that Repentance is a far slighter thing than really it is;

or

or that there is no such *indispensable necessity* of it as is pretended: and how can we excuse such as these for the affront they put upon God in not believing his Word? or in taking so little pains to understand it? But whatever Causes may be assign'd why some men repent not, this is certain, That whosoever is convinced that *Repentance* is a duty without which he cannot be saved, nor God honour'd by him, and yet *delayeth* it, delayeth it for this reason, that he is in love with some sin or other which he is not yet willing to part with; the love whereof is greater in him than his love of God, and bears it down. Otherwise his love to God would constrain him to make as much haste to *serve* and *honour* him, as his love to sin now doth to *disobey* and *dishonour* him. How long hath God already waited to be gracious? How much patience hath he had already to see himself dishonour'd by us? How many calls and warnings hath he already given us to repent? What then do we in putting off our Repentance yet longer, but in effect bid him stay a little longer yet; as though we thought him bound to wait our leisure, and observe our time, and not our selves to observe his? Yea, what is this, but, as St. Paul saith, *Rom. II. 4. To despise the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing (or not considering) that the goodness of God leadeth us to repentance?* God calls upon us in good earnest, in great *compassion*, in much *patience* and *long-suffering*; and all this purely for our own Eternal Welfare.

Welfare. *All day long* (saith he) *have I stretch-
ed out my hand unto a disobedient and gain-saying
people, Rom. X. 21. Isa. LXV. 2.* And what saith
the *delaying Sinner* to all this, when he is told of
it? *I hear you* (saith he), *but let him stay a while
longer, no haste yet, I have something else to do first.*
Why, What is it that should hinder us from
making what haste we can to be happy, in heark-
ning to so good and gracious a God and Father?
Why not now, as well as hereafter? I am yet
too young, saith the *young Sinner*; 'tis yet but the
time of blossoming with me; let me flourish a-
while in the days of my vanity; to think too
much of God, and the *other World*, of *Death* and
Judgment, would make my Flower fade too soon,
and blast all my youthful delights; to be religi-
ous so soon, is to be *old* befor my time; would
you have me turn my *Spring* into *Autumn*? I
will bear Fruit to God when Fruit-time comes.
I am too *busy* yet (saith the man of *full-growth*)
my strength is but just come, and fits me for man-
like Exercises, and the business of the World;
These are the things it now becomes men of my
strength and vigour to be wholly employ'd in.
I must not yet unfit my self for the management
of worldly Affairs, by entertaining the melan-
cholly Thoughts of preparing my self to go out
of the World. What trade can a man drive on
thrivingly in this World, if he make his Consci-
ence too soon tender and delicate? My head is
yet too full of *Cares* (saith the *old Sinner*) and I
must not neglect the present opportunity of ma-
king

king all sure to Posterity, seeing I have one foot already in the Grave. So soon as I have set all straight for this World, which I now make haste to do, I will think of the next. O how wise and provident are we all for this World, and for our lusts! Let us seriously consider now what's the plain English of all this: Are we not afraid lest God should understand it? And yet understand it he doth much better than we. *God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things,* 1 John III. 20. He knoweth very well, that the meaning of all we can say for our delaying to keep his Commandments is this, with what fine words soever we would cover it. *We will give the First-fruits, and every choice part of our time, our health, our strength, our wealth, our parts, and all we have to Sin and Satan; and the vile and refuse, and what we cannot tell how otherwise to dispose of, we will give to God, who gave us all things. Whatsoever good thing he hath bestow'd upon us, we will spend as much of it as we can upon his Enemies; and then throw him back their leavings. We are resolved to have our own will, and to do our own pleasure whilst we are able; and when we know not how to take our pleasure in any thing, we will do what we can to please God. We will do and submit to his Will, when we can no longer do what we would our selves. It's enough to bestow that upon God which is good for nothing else, or whereof we can make no other use. We may come ere we die to be deprived of all the delightful things which this World affords; we may come to*
be

to be old, and past all youthful pleasures, and worldly business too; we may come to be sick, and cannot relish any longer what before we loved; and then will it be time enough to serve God. We resolve to part with all our sins at last for God's sake, but we cannot endure to do it so soon; that is, in truth we cannot endure to part with them at all; and will never do it for his sake, nor at all, as long as we can keep them. We perfectly hate God's Service, and are resolved to keep out of it as long as we can, or dare: in plain terms, we will never serve him, if we can help it; and when we talk of resolving to serve him hereafter, we can mean no more but this; We are resolved to keep out of his service as long as ever we can, and to venture as far as ever we dare in the way to death. Now when we consider what God is in himself, and what he hath always been, and would be to us; I think it may be safely concluded, That there cannot be imagined any higher degree of baseness, whereof 'tis possible for man to be guilty, than this amounts to. And therefore nothing can be more odious and provoking to Almighty God, than this foul Sin of delaying our Repentance.

S E C T. IV.

The First Danger of Delaying.

I Am sensible how hard a thing it is to make one who *loves his sin*, to see the *baseness* of it. If he be *young*, it's hard to bring him to that degree of *seriousness* as is needful to such a thorough consideration as must make him understand it: and if he be *old*, long custom hath *hardened* him in it, and taken away the *sense* of *baseness*. But he that is grown too *impudent* to be *ashamed*, may possibly be made *afraid*; and an *apprehension* of *danger* may move him that hath lost the *sense* of *Baseness*. Let us therefore now consider the great *danger* we are in by *delaying our Repentance*, and the *keeping of God's Commandments*; and we shall find it to be no less than that of *perishing everlastingly*. We must repent before we die, or at death we sink into *Eternal Misery*; and therefore 'tis certain, that seeing none of us knoweth how soon he must die, every delay of our *Repentance*, which must be before we die, or never, is extremely *dangerous*. We say, we are *resolved* to repent; and it behoves us to do more than *resolve* upon it; for without *doing* it, how fully soever we *resolve* to do it, we must *perish* for ever. When therefore will we repent, that we may be out of *darger*? Not yet,

yet, but sometime *hereafter*. Well, but now consider it in earnest; Is there not a great deal of *danger* in driving it off till *hereafter*? Run we not a great hazard in doing so? All we can *hope* for, and all that we can *fear*, our attaining to the *one*, our escaping the *other*, depends upon our *actual Repentance*; and will we yet venture all upon *hereafter*? Suppose That *Hereafter* never come, but we die before; then farewell to all possibility of *Repentance* and *Salvation* too. Suppose we live till *Hereafter*, but be then as *unwilling* to repent as we are now; then shall we be no better, but much worse than we are now, and in more *danger* of dying in our *impenitence*, and of *Perishing*. Suppose we shall *hereafter* have some kind of *willingness* to repent, but shall not be *able* to repent so, as that God will accept of our *Repentance*; then is there no remedy, but we are undone for ever. Here then lieth the *danger* of *delaying* till *hereafter*. We know not *whether* we shall have an *hereafter* or *no* to repent in; we know not, if we have an *hereafter*, *whether* we shall repent in it or *no*: We know not, if we shall in some sort repent *hereafter*, *whether* our *Repentance* then will be accepted, and do us any good, or none. How *dangerous* then must it be to put it off till *hereafter*!

What assurance can any of us have, that we shall have an hereafter to repent in? How know we, that we shall not die before? God hath not assured us of any such thing, and Man cannot;

on what then do we build our hopes of living to any time hereafter? We are well assured, That it is appointed for all men once to die, and after that the judgment, Heb. IX. 27. We are well assured, that except we repent, we shall all perish, and die the second death, and go into everlasting punishment. But who hath assured us, that we shall have any time at all, after this that now is, to repent in? And if we be not assured of this, what can it be to put off that which must be done before we die, to another day, which we have no assurance at all that we shall live to see, but a rash hazarding of our Souls to all Eternity? What is our life? St. James hath told us, and we all know it; *It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away*, Jam. IV. 14. And thence that Apostle very rationally dissuades men from the great folly of confidently resolving, any otherwise than conditionally, to do any thing hereafter; *Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow*: How foolish a thing is it to say, *To morrow we will do this or that? Ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that*, V. 15. When we say, we will repent to morrow; do we know whether we shall be alive or dead to morrow? If we do not, what can we mean by saying so, but this; That if we live, we will repent to morrow? And are we content then to be damned if we die to night? If not, why are we so mad as to put it to the venture? *Boast not thyself of*

of to morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth, saith the Wise man, *Prov. XXVII. 1*. Alas! a day, an hour, the least moment of time may lay the strongest and most confident of us all upon our backs in the dust; and why are we confident we shall repent to morrow, when we know so little what changes one single minute may produce? Is it possible that any of us, whilst we see so many every day dropping down into the grave round about us, should need a Monitor to mind him, that this life is a very ticklish thing to trust to? What though we be *young*, and *lusty*, and *healthful*? Were not some of them so too, who died the other day; and thought they not themselves as likely to live as any of us can be? All their confidence is swallowed up of Death in a moment; and I am sure we are all of us so many days the nearer to Death, as we have out-lived them. How many hundreds yearly die in the *heat* and *wantonness* of their *youthful* blood? How many in the very fulness of *strength* and *vigour*? How many in the very throng of their worldly *business*, and whilst they are as busy as the *Bee* in gathering for *old age*? How many in the midst of their *mirth* and *jollity*, yea, in the very *acts* of *Sin*, in their *drunkenness* and *gluttony*, their *fornication* and *adultery*, their *theft* and *robbery*, their *anger* and *revenge*? How many in the height of their *security* and *confidence*, *sleeping* in their beds, *riding merrily* on the *rode*, *going busily* about their common affairs?

It's no news to hear of *sudden and unexpected* Deaths of many sorts ; and less strange can it be to any one to see those *young* people cut off by Death, who thought it too soon to become *good and serious* ; and were unwilling to marr their juvenile *pleasures* with many thoughts of *Piety and Religion*. Let us but think, how many are already Dead, who delay'd their Repentance with as much confidence as we can do, to Repent hereafter, till they had no time left them to Repent in : And how fruitlessly they now lament their folly in doing so. Think but what they would now be content to give, that they might have their life to begin again on Earth ; and whether they would, were that granted them, venture again to delay their Repentance, and hazard another sudden fall into those intollerable torments which now they feel ! O let us not stay, till thinking of this will do us no good ; let us not go on till we fall into their condition, and experience the Torments of vain and fruitless wishes. Let us not indulge our infidelity as to these things, till some come from the dead to make us believe ; lest we be made, before we fear it, to see and feel, what we make no more haste to escape. We say still, we will Repent and become new men to morrow : But alas, we know not yet whether we shall live till then ; nay, we know not but that our bodies may be in the Grave, and our Souls in Hell to morrow ; and for this very reason, because we Repent not to day.

Who

Who then that is wise will venture one moment longer on such an uncertainty ?

But suppose we may live, and have the time we at present presume so groundlessly upon ; we may not be one jot the better for it when we have it. We are to consider yet farther, how many things may happen to us at that time or before, which may as much disable us to Repent, as Death it self. We may live, and yet be as good as dead unto all manner of Religious Duty and Exercise: We may be, we know not how soon, in such a condition, as we may not be able either to *reflect* on what is *past*, or *understand* what is *present*, or *consider* what is to *come*. We cannot be ignorant how many *Diseases* suddenly surprise men, which though they do not immediately deprive them of life, yet destroy their *memory*, and *understanding*, and *reason* ; or so weaken them, that they can be of little use for the exercise of *Repentance*. May we not be suddenly taken with an *Apoplexy* or a *Lethargy* ; with a *Phrensy*, or *Melancholy*, or *Dotage* ? May we not become *mad* or *foolish*, and so distracted and crazed in our heads, that we cannot at all *consider* either what we do, or what we should do ? Yea, suppose none of these things befall us, yet are there other *diseases* and *pains*, whereunto we are subject, and which we may labour under a very considerable time before they kill us ; by which yet we may be brought into such a condition, as we shall find it very hard to perform any

Religious Duty as we ought. We may lie under such continual, and even intollerable pains of body; under such daily *languishings*, and *faintings*, and *decays* of Strength and Spirits, that we shall have very little *freedom* or *strength* of mind left us to Consider, and do all that is needful to Repentance, which till then hath been delay'd. Why do not we think our selves concern'd to prevent all these evils? Are we not sensible that such things often besal men who as little fear'd them as we do? And may they not, for ought we know, besal us as well as any others? If we are surprized by any of these after we are become sincere *Penitents*, they do us but little hurt; they are God's *Visitations* indeed; and for what, He (it may be) only knows; but the worst that comes to us by them, is only this, That we are long a dying, and in such a manner as it pleaseth God. But if we have not *sincerely Repented* before these evils seize us, it is greatly to be feared, we shall never be able to Repent; and God only knows, what will become of us. Let us then be so wise, as to make good use of our *strength* and *health*, our *senses* and *understanding*, whilst we have them. Why make we not all sure now whilst we can, seeing we know not how soon it will be, that we cannot? Now we are *young*, we are too *jovial* and *airy*; and we put all off to those years which we suppose will of course bring with them more *Seriousness*, and when we think it will better become

become us to look *gravely* and *Religiously*. When those years, which we are wont to call the years of *Discretion*, are come; we find that a great deal of other *business* comes with them; and now we are *men* and *women*, we are engaged in the *World*; and if we have got loose from the *Vanities* of *Youth*, which do not seldom hold us fast even till we die, we are become intangled in things that are but a little better; and we put off all yet till *old age* come and make us more *leisure*. *Old age* is all this while stealing insensibly upon us, and we perceive it not for the throng we are in, till we find our selves on a sudden grown too *heavy* and *dull*, and our faculties too much *decay'd*, and too *feeble* for much business. And then instead of *serious* reflections on the *state* of our *Souls*, we are rather apt to reflect with too much *concern* on our present bodily *weakness*, as we are become unable to do any longer as we have done, and yet have as great a mind to do as ever. And hence also instead of being *Penitent* for our *Sins*, we are apt to grow *Passionate*, *Peevish*, and *Impatient*; and our Repentance is still put off to our last *Sickness*. After all these delays, it may be we have no *Sickness* at all, Death gives us no warning at all of its approach, but knocks us down with a *sudden* blow; or else it sends such a Messenger for us, as will not allow us to *know* or *consider*, whither we are going, by reason of either the *stupefaction* or *Torment* which it lays us under. What remains then, but that
we

we take the Preacher's advice, *Eccles. XII. 1.* Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.

But besides the uncertainty of the term of our life, as to us; and many disappointments which not unusually befall us in it; we ought farther to consider, that it is very *Just* in God to cut our lives the shorter, for our *delaying to keep his Commandments*. Neither can we take a more likely course to provoke God to take us away in the midst of our days, or to render them by his *Judgments* intolerable to us, than this bad use which we make of them. When by delaying our Duty to God we make it appear, that we grudge him any considerable part of our time; and that we are resolved to dishonour him with as much of it, and to bestow upon his Service as little of it as we can; what readier way can we take to provoke him, either to cut our thread of life very short, or to make it very knotty to us? Can we our selves, when we think well of it, judge it fit, that he to whose goodness we owe our life, and being, and in whose hands our times are, *Psal. XXXI. 15.* In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind, Job XII. 10. should allow us just as much time as we desire, to dishonour and affront him in? I confess, I know not what greater *Presumption* we can be guilty of, than to resolve to rebel against God

as long as we can think it safe to do so, and to expect he should give us from day to day more time to do so in. O let us take heed, lest he take away our breath, and we return to our dust ere we have begun to serve him; for then be sure all these vain thoughts shall perish.

Psal. CVI. 4. The youngest of us is not sure to live one day longer; and we who grow old are very sure that we cannot have many days more, if any, to live in this World: nor what kind of days, be they many or few, they will prove to us. Let us then no longer delay our Repentance, because we are so little sure that we shall have any hereafter to repent in.

SECT. V.

The Second Danger of DELAY.

AS it is a dangerous thing to drive off our Repentance in hopes that we may have time enough hereafter to repent in: So is it altogether as dangerous upon another account, because we know not, if we have an hereafter, whether we shall repent in it, or no. I have already mention'd some things, which may enable us to repent hereafter; but besides this, it may well be fear'd, that we may be also as unwilling, and every way as much indisposed to repent hereafter, as we are now. Is there not as much reason now to move us to keep the Commandments of God, as ever there will be
here-

hereafter ? Is he not the same God now, that he will be then, *one and the same, unchangeable* for ever ? Are not our *Obligations*, and our *Dependances* on him the same ? And is not the *danger of dying impenitent*, the same now, that it will be then ? What reason then can we have to hope, that if the *consideration* of *these things* will not move us *now* to Repentance, it should prevail more with us *hereafter* ? How, *difficult*, or how *easie* soever the Duty may now seem to us ; or, whatever it is that now affrights us from it, or *encourageth* us to delay it : we have little cause to think that it will become more *easie* by *delay* ; that we shall meet with fewer *difficulties* the longer we drive it off, or fewer *temptations* to *defer* it still longer. Nay, 'tis very certain, that the longer we delay, the *difficulty* daily more and more increaseth, and very probably so will our *unwillingness* too ; for 'tis not very likely, that we shall be more *willing* to set our selves about a *harder* work *hereafter*, seeing we dare not venture on it *now* that it is much more *easie*. Would to God all impenitent Sinners could be brought to consider this, That all the good they do themselves by delaying their Repentance, is to make it every day *harder* for them to do a thing which they must do, or else they perish. That we may be convinced of this *folly*, let us observe but these few things. 1. *That the Causes of Delay will hereafter be the same, and as forcible upon us as now.* 2. *That the work will hereafter be greater.*

ter. 3. Our Strength for it is like to be less.
4. Our Time to do it in will be shorter. 5. Our
Assistances are like to be fewer. And, 6. Our
Impediments and Discouragements are like to
be more. And when all this hath been well
thought on, we cannot but see, that though
all that time which we very groundlessly pre-
sume upon, should be granted us; yet cannot we
be sure that we shall, nay, we are more sure of
the two, that we shall not make so good use of it,
as we may do of the time which is present.

1. Look what *Causes* we think we have at
present to delay our Repentance till another
time; the same, or more, and more powerful to
work upon us are we like to have hereafter;
and it is like to be as hard or harder then not
to be tempted to delay, than now it is. Is it
now a *careless, negligent and unconsidering* temper
of mind that is the cause of our delay? And is
it not likely, the longer we delay, that this
same *supine and regardless* temper will be the
more fixed and confirm'd? What is it that we
think will alter it? The *Temper* we are of is
such, as admits of none, or very slight thoughts
of any such future alteration of it; these thoughts
consist not with such a *careless and inconsiderate*
temper as we suppose to be the cause of our
delay. However, such a change of it here-
after is not to be depended on. What makes
men more *careless and secure* in their sinful
Courses, than long *impunity and forbearance*?
He that was a little afraid to venture on sin at
first,

first, lest he should be *punish'd* for it, and lest the Wrath of God should light suddenly upon him in some severe judgment; and he that was at first somewhat *ashamed* to sin, and unable to conquer his *natural Modesty*, or to endure the *reproaches* of his *natural Conscience*; after he has with some struggling broke through these bars of *fear* and *shame*, the further he ventures forward, the farther he leaves them both behind him. When the sin is become *customary*, and yet he finds that he *suffereth* nothing by it, he is the more *emboldened* to continue in it. The longer he *escapeth* what at first he was afraid of, the less apt is he to *fear* it, and the more *hope* he hath to *escape* it still. *The prosperity of fools destroyeth them, Prov. I. 32.* How! but by making them the more *careless* and *resolute* to go on in the ways wherein they *thrive*, as we find it by daily experience in all sorts of Sinners? *Because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil, Eccl. VIII. 11.*

Is the *cause* of our delay a secret root of *Atheism* or *Infidelity*, a disbelief of God, and of his Word? The longer we go on in any sin, the more likely are we to be *harden'd* in our *unbelief*. For whilst we hold on offending God, and disobeying his Word; and yet find, that notwithstanding all his *terrible threatnings*, he doth not seem to take any notice of us, but letteth us alone, and stretcheth not out his hand

to execute *vengeance* upon us, we are apt to take as little notice of God, as we foolishly imagine he taketh of us; and because we continue to do these evil things, and God keeps silence, we conclude the more confidently, either with the Fool, *Psal. XIV. 1.* That there is no God: or with another as foolish as he, *Psal. L. 21.* That he is altogether such an one as our selves. The prosperous Sinner is apt to say in his heart, God hath forgotten; he hideth his face, he will never see it. He contemneth God; he saith in his heart, Thou wilt not require it, *Psal. X. 11, 13.* The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it, *Psal. XCIV. 7.* To such a brutishness doth our continuance in sin ordinarily bring us!

Is it an unwarrantable presumption of the greatness of God's Mercy, or of his unwearied Forbearance, that is the cause of our delay? And is it not then too natural to men of this presumption, to presume still the more confidently, the longer God forbeareth them? Certainly he that delayeth at first, presuming on that patience whereof he hath yet had comparatively but little experience; will be the more apt to delay still longer, after he hath long experienced the patience and long-suffering of God.

Is it the love of our sins wherewith we are bewitched, so that we are not able to part with them, and therefore delay our Repentance? And what reason have we, if we now love them

them so well, to think, that we shall not love them as well hereafter, as now we do? What can we imagine should bring us out of love with sin more *then*, than *now*? We may not be able to *commit* some sins hereafter which now we commit; but I see not, why we may not have the same *love* for them hereafter, which we have now. Nay, I see, that usually it is so; and that few sins are less *loved* for becoming *habitual*. The more we *practise* them, the more we *love* them; and the longer we have *tasted* the sensual sweetness of them, the less can we endure to be without them. And if our *Inclinations* and *Tempers* so alter with our *Age*, that some *juvenile* sins do not relish with us as they were wont, yet we do but change them for *others*; and we are as averse from *goodness*, and as much inclin'd to *evil* as ever. The Sins which suit with *all ages* of Man, we commit with as much greediness as ever, and as things which by *custom* are become *natural*; and we *sin* even as we *eat* and *drink*; being as unable (as it seems to us) to live without the *one*, as without the *other*. And though, it may be, some sorts of Sins grow *stale*, and we find hereafter no *temptation* to them; yet is there one thing which, the longer we delay our Repentance, grows still the more strong, and that is an *inordinate self-love*; and the less we have been used to *deny our selves* in the things we love, the *harder* still shall we find it to do so. We have been used to humour our selves; and to feed
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corrupt Nature in all things which it craves; and then it's all a-case, how the Appetite changes, as to *this* or *that* sin; seeing what it desires, it must have, and we have lost all power to resist it. But these things 'tis needless to *prove*, being too notorious to be denied. Only they ought to be more *consider'd*, that when we think well how there will be hereafter as *many temptations* to delay, and as *powerful* too, as there are now; we may discern our folly in delaying our Repentance *now*, in hopes to repent *hereafter*.

2. But this is not all; for we shall certainly find, that the longer we delay, *the greater will the work be*. And then, whatever the *causes* be that now persuade us to delay it, they are more likely to persuade us to delay *hereafter* than *now*. If they can prevail with us to neglect a necessary work when 'tis *less*, they will more easily prevail when the very *greatness* of the work seems enough of it self to dishearten us from going about it.

Let us then consider, how much *greater* a work it will be to repent *hereafter*, than *now*. *First*, It is very certain, that the longer we have neglected to *learn* the will of God, the more we have to learn. And the longer we have neglected to *do* the Commandments of God, the more we have to do. The longer we stay *before* we *repent*, the *more sins* we have to repent of. He that hath long since begun his work, and hath made a considerable pro-
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gress in it, will not hereafter find so much to do, as he that hath done nothing at all of it, but hath then all to begin. All those *Omissions* and *Neglects* we have been every day guilty of, come then to be repented of; as well as the *things* which have been *neglected* and *omitted*, as far as 'tis possible, to be done; and all this labour had been saved, had we repented and done our duty in due time. We every day sin, even though we do all that we can to avoid it; (which yet we seldom do) and every day we ought to repent of the sins of the day; and therefore till we repent, every day much encreaseth the labour of Repentance, because every day adds to the number of our sins to be repented of. And our delay to repent, when we have sinned, is one of the greatest sins of all; and every day's delay is such a new sin added to that of the former day. And indeed, so long as a man delayeth his Repentance, he doth nothing else but heap up sin upon sin; and every thing he doth, is full of sin. And what a task doth he thus make himself, to repent of all these sins hereafter? Yea, every *Conviction* that we have sinned, and ought to repent; and every *purpose*, and *resolution*, and *thought* of repenting, not speedily put in execution, is an *aggravation* of our guilt, and makes our sins the more *sinful*, the less *excusable*, and more hardly *pardonable*; because 'tis a sign that we go on in sin against *Knowledge*, against *Conscience*, against the good *Motions* of God's holy Spirit, and against the *Rebukes* of our own Hearts; the delay
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is throughly *wilful*, and sin is freely *chosen*; and thus our sins become as great as can be, and are a *striving* against *Conscience*, a *resisting* and *grieving* of the *Spirit*, a *quenching* of its holy *Motions*, and a *daily fighting* against God, or a resolute maintaining our ground against him. And must not all this make Repentance a much *harder* work, than otherwise it might have been? How much easier is it to pluck up two or three weeds daily in a Garden, as we perceive them shooting forth; than to weed one that, through neglect, is quite over-run with them? and to how much better purpose too were it so to do? For by that means, the good Plants heve liberty to thrive and flourish; whilst by neglect, all that's good is choaked up, and rarely turns to any advantage. So much easier is it, and to far better purpose and advantage to repent *early* than *late*. When one hath gone on but a few steps in a *wrong* way, and will not then turn back, because he thinks it too much *pains* for him to do so; how much more *unwilling* is he like to be to go back again, when he is gone on many miles? He that is afraid to encounter two or three Enemies at present, will hardly be so stout afterwards as to set upon an Army of many thousands: especially when by his delay he hath given them time to strengthen themselves. And this is the *second* thing that we are here to consider, that by our delay we suffer our sins to grow not only in *number*, but in *strength* too: and as it is easier to repent of a *few* sins than *many*; so must it needs be a far *harder*

task to conquer *many* sins in their *full strength*, than a *few*; and *weaker* too. Every one knows by woful experience, if ever he have attempted to get the mastery of his sin, what *strength* every sin gains in us by our long *accustoming* of our selves to it: and how much easier it is to leave off the practice of any sin, after but *once* or *twice* committing it, than after that by frequent committing of it, it is become *habitual*, and in a manner *natural* to us; and when we have by *custom* brought our selves to that pass, that we seem to our selves to stand in as much need of our *sin*, as we do of our *food* and *raiment*, and can as little be *content* without it. 'Tis easy to pluck up a tender Sprout of the first or second years growth; but this, by letting it stand and grow, is every year harder and harder to do; and at last, when 'tis become a strong Tree, impossible for the strongest man to do. 'Tis easy to quench a small spark that's but just taking hold of the Thatch; but 'tis not so easy to extinguish the fire, when the whole House is on a flame. It may be no difficult matter to cure a little Sore at first; but it will be more hard to do it, when by delay 'tis grown into a hollow and filthy Ulcer; and hardly possible, if it come to a Cancer, or a Gangreen. How strange a thing is it then, that we should delay our Repentance, the only cure of a diseased and ulcerous Soul, till by delay we become almost past possibility of being cured! *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the Leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil*, Jer. XIII. 23,

3. As our work by delay grows greater, so our strength for such a work grows less; and that makes it still harder. The more sick a man groweth, or the longer he lieth under his Disease, the weaker he groweth too, and the less strength he hath to help himself. Tho we are all corrupt enough by nature; and as we are so of our selves, by much too weak to conquer any Lust without the help of *supernatural* Grace: yet our giving way to our *natural* corruption, and our indulging our selves in our own *weaknesses*, makes us still weaker and weaker. He that exerciseth not his strength, by degrees loseth it. And he that instead of *resisting* his Enemy as well as he can, layeth himself down at his feet to be trod upon, will find that he hath then less strength to raise himself up, than he had at first to stand his ground. In like manner, he that, instead of making what *defence* he is able, stands still, and lets his Enemy give him wound after wound as long as he will; if he have a mind to save himself at last, may find that he hath not strength enough left him, either to fight, or run away. In three things principally a man's *natural* strength to withstand a temptation to wickedness, or to change an ill Custom for a better, may seem to consist: 1. In the conduct of *natural* Conscience. 2. In the virtue of deliberate Consideration. 3. In the hope of Success. But by delaying our Repentance, we lose more and more of this strength daily.

First, Though our Natures be strongly *biass-*

ed towards Evil, and we do mightily of our selves *incline* that way; yet is there such a thing in us as the *light of Nature*; whereby we see, in many things, that we go wrong, and walk so, as it very much misbecometh us to do. We yet retain some *Principles of Morality*, and *natural Notions* of Good and Evil, *Honesty* and *Dishonesty*, *Decency* and *Indecency*, which are not quite crazed, nor worn out. And our *Consciences* are ready to check us for doing contrary to our *Nature*, and to reproach us with the *unreasonableness* and *shamefulness* of acting some evil things. But when we long neglect to hearken to our *Reason*, and to obey the dictates of it, yielding to our brutish *Affections*, and giving them the sole command of us, we by degrees forget we have any such thing as *Reason* to direct us, and our *Consciences* fall asleep, having nothing to do, our unruly *Lusts* ruling us in every thing. We can see nothing *unhandsome* in what we are fondly in love with, nor can we any more be *ashamed* of what we have long *accustomed* our selves unto; especially when we find we are not *alone* in any of our sin, but find *Companions* enough to embolden us in any wickedness. *Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush,* Jer. VI. 15. The Sinner, after a little time, begins to think it a piece of *bravery* to be *impudent*, and to glory in his *shame*; and nothing must be thought *unreasonable*, or *undecent*, that he hath a mind to do. Thus our foolish Hearts are more and more *darken'd*

en'd, and our Conscience seared as with a hot iron, 1 Tim. IV. 1.

And when it is so with us, that our *Reason* bears no sway for the tyranny of our *Lusts*, there can be no help from *Consideration*, because there can be no such thing to any purpose; this being the proper work of *Reason* uningaged by *affecti-on*, and at *liberty* to do its office. Or if sometimes *Conscience* be a little startled upon any occasion, and begin to be restless, and set our *thoughts* on work a while; yet alas, the condition, which by delaying our Repentance we bring our selves into, is so *sad* and *frightful*, that we cannot indure to *think much* of it, but presently turn our thoughts another way, and busy them about something more *pleasant* to us. Indeed most of us have learn'd well enough, how to keep our selves from all *serious Consideration* of either the *unreasonableness*, *shame*, or *danger* of our sinful ways; being always so *busy* about the Affairs of the *World*, or our *Vanities*, or in making provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof, that we are seldome at *leisure* to think much on any thing else.

Lastly, By long continuing in our sins, and giving way to our Lusts, we give them so much the mastery and dominion over us, that when at any time we are able to *consider* a little in what a wretched State we are, and begin to have some thoughts of getting into a better, we find our selves so fast *hamper'd* by them, and that they have taken such strong hold of us, that an *extra-*

ordinary strength is necessary to break loose from them. Hereupon our *Courage* quite fails us, and we have no *hopes* at all that ever we can be able to recover our selves out of the snare wherein we have suffered our selves to be so much intangled; all our *spirits* therefore sink down into *Despair*; and we are not willing to labour (as we fear) in vain, or to disquiet our selves any longer about what we imagine past all help. O that we could be brought in time to *Consider* how by delay we are apt to be perfectly *infatuated*, and as it were *Inchanted*; having no use of *Reason* or *Consideration*; no *Courage* left us to attempt our Freedom, or *Hope* to obtain it; but lye in our slavery without any *Sense* of our vile Condition, and without either *Wit* or *Strength* ever to come out of it.

4. As by Delay our *Work* grows greater, and our *Strength* less; so our time is every day shortened; and tho we have both more to do, and less Skill and Ability to work, yet have we less time for our work. The more time we have already sinned away, the less we are sure is behind to Repent, serve God, and provide for our Souls in. Tho we may know how much we have had already to an ill purpose, as we have abused it; yet we know not how little, or whether any at all, will be granted us for a better. We are sure, That what is yet to come, cannot be very long, because so much is already gone; and yet put both together, were it possible, all would have been short enough for the work we had to do in it.

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Now if a work be so great, that it cannot be done perfectly, and as well as it should be done, tho a man take the whole day to it, is it not a madness to drive it off, hoping it may be done well enough in one or two of the last hours of the day? He that hath the lost time of many Years to redeem, had need to ply his business very close indeed, if he hope to do it in a few days. Can we think that our corrupt hearts and minds will be thoroughly *changed and cleansed*, all our sinful desires and affections quite *altered*, our whole Conversation *reformed*, every evil habit *broken off*, every lust *mortified*, and the whole man *renew'd*, all Graces *acquired*, Sanctification *compleated*, and every necessary Duty *perform'd* all on a sudden, in a moment of time? If the work be so *easy*, and so *little* time will serve to do it in, the more is our *Shame and Guilt* both, and the less *excusable* are we that we have done all no sooner, having had so much time already to do it in.

And yet supposing all might be done in so little time, and we might repent sufficiently and satisfyingly of a long wicked life in some small part of it towards the end; it ought to be considered, That a little time will hardly be enough for a man to try and be well assured of the *Sincerity* of his Repentance; and yet we know, that if it be not *sincere*, it will do us no good; and till we know it is *sincere*, it can afford us little *Comfort*. He that repents earliest, shall now and then meet with Temptations to *doubt* whether he hath *sincerely*

cerely repented or no; and it will cost him some pains to search into his own heart, and to make himself in any good and comfortable measure sure of it. And to find this, is the only thing that must be the comfort of his old age, and the sweetness of his Dying thoughts. But he that defers his Repentance to the latter part of his Life, if then he may Repent unto Salvation, yet may he find the time much too short for him very comfortably to assure himself that he hath done so indeed; and therefore though he may Repent, possibly he may not be able so well to know it, as not to go out of this World with many fears and doubts, and much uncomfortable distraction of thoughts about it. And though this may possibly be the case of some, who have lived a life of Repentance; yet it is not a thing a man would chuse, or that he should not do what he can to prevent, as I am sure he that delayeth his Repentance doth not. He that lives well, may through the tenderness of his Conscience, and jealousy of himself, dye somewhat uncomfortably; but he that lives ill almost as long as he lives, I think must needs do so, if he be not so dozed or stupified with his disease, that he cannot be sensible that he is a dying; or else have the favour of some extraordinary Revelation, which such an one of all men hath least reason to hope for.

5. For he that long delayeth his Repentance, hath reason enough to fear, that he shall have less assistance hereafter for this great work than now he may have. All the helps we can hope for, come

come from the *Holy Spirit* of God, without whose *special* Grace we shall never do any thing that is acceptable to him, or available to our own Salvation. We are too weak of our selves to cleanse our selves from all filthiness of Flesh and Spirit, and to perfect Holiness: It is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Now That man must have a strange measure of unreasonable confidence, that thinks he hath the *Grace* of God at his Command, and can make himself sure to have it just when he shall call for it; or that the longer he hath rejected it, the greater measures of it should be bestow'd upon him. Is this the way to oblige God to be more liberal of his *Grace* unto us hereafter, to turn his *Grace* already given us into wantonness? Is to Dishonour him as long as we can, the best way to assure us of his help in time of need? What is it then, whereby any one can possibly provoke God to withdraw or withhold his *Grace* from him? What needs any one care how he lives, if he can be sure of *Grace* enough to save him at any time before he die? And if he cannot be sure to have *Grace* enough at any time when he pleaseth before he die, how dare he delay his Repentance any one day of his life, lest he should die before the next day? Certainly that person that delayeth his Repentance in expectation of *Grace*, when he sees his own time to call for it, hath a confidence grounded on something else than the *Holy Scripture*. Far be it from us to limit the infinite Goodness of God.

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His *Mercies* as well as his *Judgments* are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out. *Extraordinary favours* may be granted to some, but are not to be *relied* on by any. I hope God doth give Grace at last to many who have long refused it; but I know not where he hath promised that he will offer it again to them that refuse it when 'tis offered. If therefore he that delays his Repentance in hope of *Grace* to Repent hereafter, meet with the *Grace* he hoped for, he hath cause to be *extraordinary thankful* for an *unpromised Mercy*; but if any one expect to have such an *extraordinary Mercy*, he hath great reason to be humbled for so *groundless a presumption*. For this is not the *ordinary* method of saving Sinners, which God hath made us acquainted with: and certainly he makes too bold with God Almighty, that expects he should bring him to Heaven by any other way than by that which he hath pointed out unto him to walk in; or who hopes for that assistance which he never promis'd, refusing to make use of that which he hath assured him of if he will now accept it. God hath said, that *whosoever bath*, or makes good use and improvement of the *Grace* already given, *to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance*: But *whosoever bath not*, or makes not a wise improvement of what God hath given, to the Donor's Glory and his own Salvation, *from him shall be taken away even that he bath*, Matth. XIII. 12. God *ordinarily*, as well as *justly*, leaves such men to grow worse hereafter, who are not willing to grow

grow *better* now. He withdraws his Holy Spirit from them, who have long *resisted* and *grieved* him. They who are not now willing to recover themselves out of the snare of the Devil, having been taken captive by him at his will, are deservedly left in the slavery they delight in. God saith unto them, *Hearing ye shall hear, and not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive,* Matth. XIII. 14. He leaves them to Satan to *blind their eyes, and harden their hearts, lest they should be converted, and Christ should heal them,* John XII. 40. What a madness then must it be to delay our acceptance of the Grace which is now freely tender'd unto us, in hope of having it tender'd to us again, when we think it a fitter time for it, when God hath declared that we do thereby provoke him to withdraw his Grace from us for ever, and never to make us another offer of it so long as we live.

6. *Lastly, Our Impediments and Discouragements* are like to be *more and greater*, the longer we delay: As a stone that's a tumbling down the hill, the longer it continues rousing downwards, goes with the greater *force*, and is more hardly stopped; so our own *corrupt inclinations*, the longer we give way to them, carry us on with the more *earnestness* in the old beaten paths of Sin towards Hell beneath, and the more difficult is it for us to recover our selves. Our *old acquaintance* and *brethren in iniquity*, the longer we continue in their Society and Friendship,

ship, cling so much the closer unto us; and use all their *art* and *power* to hold us fast; so that 'tis always harder to break from them. The *Devil*, who before *emboldened* us to rush headlong upon any wickedness, without any check or restraint of *Conscience*, now fills our heads with *fears* and *jealousies*, that our case is already become *desperate*; and he that before persuaded us it was too *soon*, now persuades us 'tis too *late* to think of providing for our safety. The longer we continue in our *folly*, the more *foolish* we grow; and the less capable of being taught how to grow *Wise* unto *Salvation*. And the wicker we have been, and the more shamefully we have behaved our selves, the more ashamed we grow to confess, that we have so long been *mad*, and *base*, and *brutish*, and to change our course of life for that which we have so long scorn'd as *foolishness*. There are so many *restitutions*, *reparations*, *satisfactions*, and *confessions* to be made to our injured Neighbours; so much *humbling* of our selves, and *Pardon* to be begged both of *God* and of all men whom we have offended; there is so much more *pains* to be taken and *diligence* to be used in redeeming our mispent time, and fitting our Souls for Heaven, that very few who have lived long in wickedness, have *courage* to venture upon, and go through all this. Besides, there are not very many persons who by living long have less *business*, or fewer *cares* and *troubles* upon them of one sort or other; however, they have thereby
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more *bodily infirmities*, and usually less *vigour* and *activeness of mind*. And how then can any one judge it fit to delay a most *necessary duty*, which might before have been done with less disturbance, to such a time as this, when we cannot hope for fewer *hindrances* and *discouragements* than we formerly had, if we find not many more, as is not unusual? From all this, I suppose, it must now be very plain to every one, That as we are not sure of any *time* at all hereafter to Repent in, so neither can we be sure if we shall have time, that we shall Repent in it. Nay, I think 'tis plain enough, that it is more likely of the two, *that we shall not*.

S E C T. VI.

The third Danger of DELAY.

A *Third danger of delaying our Repentance* is this, That we know not, if in some sort we shall repent hereafter, whether our Repentance then will be accepted, and do us any good, or none. And certainly this is a Point which any wise man would be well satisfied in, before he venture to defer his Repentance one moment longer. Let us therefore consider well of it. Shall we defer our Repentance till it will do us no good? And are we sure, that if we defer it now, it will do us good hereafter? If God will not accept

accept of it, it can do us no good. And how are we sure that God will then accept of it? Whether he will accept of it or not, I know not any one in the World besides himself that can tell; and I do not remember that God himself hath any-where told us that he will. He hath told us, That without Repentance he will not save us; and he hath told us, That if we repent we shall be saved: But I cannot remember where he hath told us, That though we repent not now, but put it off to another time, we may then so repent, that he will accept of our Repentance, and save us.

It will be said by those who have no mind to repent yet, that God hath told us, That all who repent and believe the Gospel shall be saved: and that if any man shall turn from all his wickedness which he hath committed, he shall live. And therefore, whether one repent early or late, if he repent at all, he shall be saved. Now I very readily and gladly grant what God in his Word hath told us to our great encouragement and comfort, if we will make a right use of it: That CHRIST JESUS came into the World to save Sinners, and those very great Sinners too, and such as had continued very long in a state of sin; and that we have no reason in the world to fear, that any one, how great a Sinner soever he hath been, shall be rejected of him, if he unfeignedly repent and believe the Gospel. All this is a most comfortable truth, and we have great
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reason to be heartily thankful for it. But after all this, we had need to be very careful that we be not mistaken in the meaning of those two words, BELIEVING and REPENTING: and that we do not understand by them any other things, than that very *Faith* and *Repentance* unto which *salvation* is promised. Now as some, I fear, take a *Faith* that implieth not a *holy Life*, for a *saving Faith*; so some may take *Repentance*, that implies not a *holy Life*, for a *saving Repentance*. And it is to be greatly fear'd, that both these are mistaken. And whoso considereth those descriptions of *Repentance* which have been already given from the words of the HOLY GHOST himself, will, I doubt not, see cause enough to fear the same that I do. I doubt not, but many who have long delay'd their *Repentance*, do at length *repent* in *very good earnest* that they have done so foolishly; and I hope that some of them are accepted of God: but I do not think that *all* who *repent* in *earnest* of their wicked life past, and of their long and foolish delay, *repent unto salvation*; and it is hard for any one to know certainly whether any do or no. God hath not told us how long any of us may hold on in our sins, and not finally exclude our selves thereby from the benefit of *Repentance*; neither hath he told us, that I know of, that he will accept of the *Repentance* of that man, who hath to the latter end of his life wilfully delay'd it, in hopes of find-

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ing then both *time* and *grace* enough for it. But he hath told us enough to make us *fearful*, lest he should not. There are several Passages of *Holy Scripture* that may well *afright* us from *presuming* on it, but not one that gives the least *encouragement* or *courtenance* to it. God frequently *threatens* wilful *Delayers* of their *Repentance*, either to *cut them off suddenly*, or to deliver them up to a *hardened heart*; but I cannot find, that he *promiseth* them *Grace* hereafter, who will not *hearken* to his *present Call*; or that he will *accept* of them in *their own time*. Thus we read, — *He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroy'd, and that without remedy*, Prov. XXIX 1. *Happy is the man that feareth always; but he that hardeneth his heart, shall fall into mischief*, Prov. XXVIII. 14. *He that despiseth the riches of God's goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth him to repentance, after his hardness and impenitent heart, treasureth up unto himself wrath against the day of wrath*, Rom. II. 4, 5. *Those who liked not to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them up to a reprobate mind*, Rom. I. 28. But very terrible indeed are these following Sayings of the *Holy Ghost* in *Scripture*, Heb. VI. 4, &c. *It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; if they shall fall away,*

to renew them again unto repentance: seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers, is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned. Add hereunto that other place of the same Epistle, Heb. X. 26, &c. If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the Covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace? 'Tis true, these places of this Epistle are commonly interpreted of Apostacy from the Faith of Christ to Judaism or Idolatry; and it may be they were some such Apostates that gave the Apostle an occasion of writing this; yet I think, that hardly any considering man will deny, that they are to be extended as well to all those who resolutely lead a life quite contrary to the Gospel of Christ, notwithstanding that in words they profess themselves to be Christians; seeing all such do equally, with the other, despise and trample on the Gos-

pel and Covenant of Christ. The same Apostle, *Heb. III. 7, &c.* propounds unto *Christians* the Example of the *Israelites* in the Wilderness, to take warning by in this case. To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my Works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, they shall not enter into my rest. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God: but exhort one another daily, whilst it is call'd to day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Let us moreover read with trembling what we find to this purpose in the First Chapter of the *Proverbs*. There we shall see the method that God usually takes with Sinners. First, he graciously and earnestly invites them to Repentance, *v. 22.* How long ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity; and the scorers delight in scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof; Behold I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. But Sinners turn their deaf ear to this, and make no haste to return, though they see God in haste to do them good. How long? saith he. 'Tis yet time enough, say they. But how doth God resent such an Answer? *v. 24.* he tells them

them this ; *Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded : but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof ; I will also laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh.* Well, but suppose they begin now at last to consider what danger they are in ; and repenting of their simplicity, folly and obstinacy, call upon God for help ; hear now what God saith to this too : *v. 28. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer, they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me. For that they hated knowledge, and did not chuse the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counsel, they despised my reproof ; therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.* What saith Job of the Hypocrite , *Job XXVII. 9. Will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him ? He asks the question, and God himself hath answer'd it ; Ezek. VIII. 18. Though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them.* And saith Micah, *cap. III. v. 4. He will even hide his face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings.* Yea, saith God, *Isa. I. 15. When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you ; when ye make many prayers I will not hear.* So the Psalmist tells us it fared with some that he was too well acquainted with ; *They cried, but there was none to save them, even unto the Lord, but he answer'd them not.* And all this is very

just and equal, and Sinners cannot expect to find any better treatment with God; *Zech. VII.*

12. As he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the Lord of hosts. Why should he? Must vile Sinners

have the command of God's Ear? And must the glorious Majesty of Heaven and Earth wait on every filthy Wretch as long as he pleaseth?

and alway be ready at his beck, and come at his call? Hath not God waited to be gracious to

us, begged and beseech'd us from day to day, even from our infancy to this hour; and must

he yet be made to wait longer, and even as long as we please; and after we have slighted

his Favours, and abused his Patience, and put what affronts we can upon his Divine Ma-

jesty; can we expect that he should not turn away from us in anger and indignation, and

swear in his wrath, that we shall not see his face, nor hear his voice any more? I conclude

with those words of the Holy Ghost, *2 Pet. II. 20.* *If after they have escaped the pollutions*

of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again intangled

therein, and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had

been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known

it, to turn from the holy commandment deliver'd unto them.

When

When such *Scriptures* as these are well consider'd, we shall find, that a man hath great reason to doubt, whether a *late Repentance* will be *accepted* or no. Wonderful indeed is the Infinite Goodness of God to Sinners; he doth often *more*, but never *less* than he promiseth; and he doth often a great deal *less* than he threatneth, and granteth unto us that time of *repentance* which we had no reason to expect from him: but whilst we magnify, as we are bound, the *Patience*, and *Long-suffering* of God; we must take heed how we forget his *Justice* and *Truth*; or how we speak so of *those*, that we know not how to reconcile what we say of them with what he himself hath said of *these*. A very *late Convert* may be at last *converted*, and upon his *late conversion* shall be *accepted*: and I dare not say, that if he do not come in at the *first* or *second* call, the door of Salvation shall be shut against him. I dare not say positively, that God will never grant Repentance unto life to any one who hath a *long time delay'd* his Repentance, after he is *convinced* of the necessity of it; or to keep the Commandments of God, after he hath *covenanted* and *engaged* himself in his *Baptism* so to do; or after he hath been often *put in mind* of his Engagement, and hath had many *warnings* to do his acknowledged duty; yea, or that hath *presumptuously* delay'd his Repentance, *purposing*, and *hoping* for *time* to repent afterward. I know not how much mercy God may have in store, that he

hath not acquainted us with: but I dare not rely upon what I know not of. I know not what *extraordinary* things God's infinite goodness may bring to pass; but because they are *extraordinary*, I dare not venture so great a thing as my Salvation upon them, seeing what is *extraordinary* may, for ought I know, never be. Because God *extraordinarily* fed the *Israelites* with *Manna*, and can feed me so too if he please, I dare not neglect my *common Bread* when I may have it, in expectation of such another Miracle. And I cannot see, but it is altogether as foolish a thing as that would be, to presume on the *extraordinary* favours of God to *long-impenitent* Sinners, neglecting to follow the *common Rules* of *holy life*, and of keeping in God's favour, which he hath given me in his Word. Shall we neglect the *express Conditions* of his *gracious Promises*, presuming on an *extraordinary* thing never promised, which is, that the *thing promised* shall be given to him that never observed the *Conditions* on which it was promised to be given? If we repent when we are called to it, and continue all our life-long in a *state of Repentance*, repenting always of our sins as we commit and discover them, and endeavouring as much as we can to avoid them for the future; we may be very sure of mercy and acceptance, because it is *promised* to all that do so. But this I most confidently say, That he who being call'd often to repentance, wilfully delayeth it from time to

to time, thinking it always soon enough to leave off sinning hereafter, and to serve God towards the end of his life; and that his repentance will come time enough then to find acceptance; reckons, as we we say, without his Host, and presumeth on that which he cannot find that God hath promised him; and therefore hath cause enough to fear that his repentance may come too late, and it will not prove the Repentance which God made the condition of his Promise: especially, when he considers withal, how God hath express'd his dislike of all delays, and what severe things he hath said against the delaying Sinner in his Word. Is it not strange, that one who sees that there is no promise of Salvation but to the *penitent liver*; and hears many Threatnings denounced against such as *delay* to accept of the Invitation of God to repentance; should yet be confident, that after he hath by his wilful delays, declared as much as a man can do without saying it with his mouth, that he hath no mind at all to serve God, but accounts any little portion of his time, not knowing how short it will prove, enough, if not too much for him; he shall yet be accepted of God at last, and rewarded by him too? He holds out as long as he can against God, and yet hopes that God will readily grant him his own terms, when he can hold out no longer.

I would to God we could be persuaded to consider a little impartially with our selves,
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what kind of thing such a *late Repentance*, after long and *wilful delays*, is like to prove: especially, when it hath been delay'd till our last *sickness*, and we begin to fear we have but some few days, or weeks at most, to live. What reason can we find to persuade us, to think such a Repentance to be the true Repentance, to which Pardon and Salvation are promised: When we would by no means be persuaded to repent so long as we saw it probable we might live some years longer, how is it imaginable that we then repent upon any other motive, than a present fear of speedy damnation? And can this be thought a saving Repentance? God's great *love* and *kindness* a thousand ways exercised towards us; His *Sovereign Authority* over us, and *Commands* laid upon us; His *Mercy* and *Bounty*, His *Wooings* and *Beseechings*, His *Invitations* and *Promises*, the wonderful *love* of our *Blessed JESUS*, witnessed by his *Humiliation*, *Sufferings*, and *bloody Death*, for our Redemption; nay, all the most dreadful *Threatnings* of an *Almighty* and most *Righteous* offended God against *impenitent Sinners*, had no force at all upon us, so long as we had either *youth*, or *health*, or *prosperity*: Nothing could prevail with us, till we found our selves declining apace towards the *Grave*, and fear'd we were just about to sink down into *Hell*: and what else could it be that then put us upon thoughts of repenting more than at other times, but *fear* of being tormented? And then what can our Repentance

penitance at such a time signify more than this, That as we had always loved our Sin better than God, as long as we were in a capacity of enjoying it; so now that we cannot enjoy it any longer, and fear we are going to be punish'd for it, though we love it as well as ever, and would act it over again, were we able; yet we are sorry we have been so foolish, as to bring our selves into this *danger* that we now apprehend our selves to be in. And seeing we can have no more pleasure in this World, which we are now leaving much against our will; yet we love our ease still, and are willing to do what we can to escape Eternal Pains, and we startle at the thoughts of going impenitent, as we have always been, to meet with our provoked Judge in the other World; and we would fain step back again from the mouth of Hell; and therefore we fall a praying and begging God with sad sighs, and sorrowful tears, either to pardon us, and take us to Heaven, if we must go hence; or else to spare us a-while longer; which if he will do, we resolve to live in obedience to his Laws as long as we live? Are not most Malefactors thus penitent, after a severe Sentence is given, and they see no remedy but it must be presently executed upon them? And yet it is not because their hearts are *changed*, but because they are *terrified* with the punishment they are to bear; not that they are on a sudden saine in love with a virtuous life, but because they must now live no longer. How a
man

man should attain to such a degree of confidence, as to hope that God will accept of a Repentance which is not at all for his sake, but merely for our own; which hath nothing of the *love* of God or *Goodness* in it, but only a *fear* of Judgment and Hell-fire; no change at all of our *Affections* from Sin to *Holiness*, from *Earth* to *Heaven*, from our carnal *Selves*, to *God*; but only a change of our *Security* into *Fear*, and of our *Pleasure* into *Sorrow*; and it may be of our *Minds* into a *very serious Resolution* to live better, if we shall live any longer; and that merely because we are *afraid* that we shall live no longer: how any one should think such a *forced Change* as this, an *acceptable Repentance*, I must confess I know not, unless he have forgotten not only his *Bible*, but his *Reason* too.

There are some things, as *useful* as they are *easy*, to be observed in *dying* People, who have spent their days in wickedness. And I think they are enough to fright any one from thinking any longer of having the *benefit* of a *Death-bed Repentance*.

First, It is too easie to observe, That often such a *Sinner's Conscience* is quite dead within him (I speak of some, not of all) a long time before he dieth, and never reviveth again so long as he liveth. He is given up to a *reprobate mind*, and his heart turn'd to *stone*, and nothing that should move him to *Repentance* can make any impression upon it. Yea, 'tis
some;

somewhat a rare thing, to see an *old, habitual, customary* Sinner ever come to any true *sense* of *Religion*, his *Duty*, his *Sin*, or his *Danger*; or ever to concern himself at all about *Eternity*. Even upon his *Death-bed*, whatever care he takes about his *Body*, *Estate*, and *Family*, his *Soul* seems as much forgotten by him, as if he had none at all to take care of. It is no uncommon thing to see an *old Sinner* die thus *unconcerned* what shall become of him.

Secondly, It is as easie to observe in some of these dying Persons, who seem to make some little ado about their *future State* when they are about to die; that though they are desirous of good *Advice*, and send for the *Minister* to talk to them, and *pray* for them; and confess to him some few of their most *notorious* Faults; yet are they the *confidentest* Persons in the World of their *pardon*; 'tis not easy to persuade them that their case is very dangerous; but after they have confess'd they are great Sinners, and have been pray'd for, as though all were done, they pass off the Stage of this World as unconcernedly, as if they had never acted any ill part thereon.

Thirdly, It hath been very often observ'd, that those of them who in some very dangerous sickness have made more ado than ordinary, have cried out very bitterly of their past wickedness and folly; have shed many tears, and poured out many earnest Prayers, and have made many Vows to God, and Promises to Men of
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leading a new and holy life, if God would restore them to health; have yet very shortly after their recovery, forgotten all this, as if it had never been; returning with the Dog to his vomit, and with the Sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire. Shewing plainly, that though they might be in *earnest*, yet was it but for *fear*; and how little credit is to be given to such *forced Repentances*!

Fourthly, 'Tis to be observed, That whatever else these *old* and *hardened* Sinners are wont to do upon their Death-beds, which may look like repentance; they are not easily persuaded to confess any very *soul* Sin, which is not so *notorious*, that they cannot deny it; and then too, it shall be *excused* as well as they can, instead of being *aggravated* as it ought to be. With much more difficulty can they be persuaded to make *restitution* of all they have ill gotten, or so much as to *confess* their *Frauds*, and *wicked Arts* of injuring others. Rarely do they send for those whom they have *offended*, *humbling* themselves, *confessing* their *Faults*, *begging* their *pardon*, and making them all the *satisfaction* they can before they die. And what kind of Penitents are these?

Lastly, If any of these *old Sinners* at last be touch'd to the quick, and pricked at the heart with a sharp sense of their sinful Vileness; it is not hard for the malicious and cunning *Tempter*, to bring them into *despair*, so as it shall be impossible for any one to *comfort* them, and in
vain

vain to *counsel* them. Their own *long-abused Consciences* do now begin to revenge themselves upon them, for neglecting them so long; and they know 'tis so *just* a thing for God now to serve them, as they have served him, that they conclude it in vain to seek for *pardon* and *mercy*. He that stands by the Bed-side of these old Sinners, when they are on their last Bed, may easily observe all this that I have said of them: and that but a few of them, in comparison, die so, as that one has any great encouragement to say their *repentance* was any thing else, but the *grief* and *remorse* of a heart oppress'd with *fear* of *imminent danger*, whereinto they find themselves brought by their own folly and perverseness.

It is easy on the other side to observe the Death of the *truly pious Christians* to differ very much from the death of this sort of men; I mean, as often as in their sickness they have *time* and *freedom* of mind to shew what kind of spirit they are of. In many respects, as the one dieth, so dieth the other: *these* may be cut off by a *sudden stroke*, they may die of a *distracting* or *stupifying* Disease, as well as the *other*; and the *frame* of their *hearts* is to be seen only in their *life*, and not in their *death*. However, only those few dying Persons, who have in their health conscientiously endeavour'd to *live* a truly Christian life, and have their Repentance not to *begin*, but only to *finish* with their life upon their *Death-bed*, shew, if they have *time*, and *strength*, and *liberty* to shew it, that

that they die indeed like *sincere Christians*: For either they end their days of trouble in much spiritual joy and comfort, reflecting sweetly on the mighty powers of *Divine Grace*, whereby they have been carried *victoriously* through all the Temptations of the Devil, the World, and the Flesh, and in the ravishing expectation of entering speedily into the joy of their Lord: Or being Persons of *tender Consciences*, and deeply wounded in spirit with the sense of all their own *imperfections* and *failings*, they shew all the signs of an *humble, broken and contrite heart*; and close up their time with the *Prayers and Tears, Sighs and Groans* of a devout Soul, longing to be made perfectly holy in Heaven with God; and endeavouring to that end thus to *compleat and perfect* all their *Repentances* on Earth.

Some will possibly ask, If there be so little trust to be put in a *very late and Death-bed Repentance*, Why the *Ministers of Christ*, when they are call'd to assist the Sick, do so earnestly exhort even the most *notorious Sinners*, who have spent their *whole time* past in *wickedness*, to repent of their sins; and comfort them with the *promises of Salvation*, if they do repent?

This *Question*, I confess, deserves to be consider'd; both that the *Minister* may take heed that he go not beyond his Commission in *comforting* the Sick; and that we may all learn in due time, how far we may build and *rely* on such *Comforts* as men in such a case can administer unto us. And therefore I here in answer to it, say these things.

First,

First, We very earnestly exhort the worst of Sinners, even to the last gasp, to repent of their sins; because, though we cannot assure them, that God will now at the last hour accept of their late Repentance, seeing he hath no-where, as was said before, declared that he will; and though, by reason of what is said in his Word concerning his ordinary method of dealing with Sinners, we are rather afraid that he will not: Yet we do not know the depth of God's Mercy, nor the riches of his Infinite Goodness; nor what he may be pleas'd to do in an extraordinary way, if Sinners at last use extraordinary endeavours. And if by such Motives, and Arguments, and Prayers as we can use, God seem to work mightily on the spirit of the dying Sinner; though we dare not assure him of the life which God hath not promised to a Death-bed Repentance, and therefore we cannot be sure that he will give it: yet dare we not leave him to despair, because we know not but God may give it.

Secondly, We therefore exhort the worst of dying Sinners to Repentance, and declare unto them the gracious and comfortable Promises which God in Christ hath made to all true Penitents; because God hath commanded us to Preach Repentance unto Sinners without exception; and herein, as we obey, so we imitate our Lord and Master JESUS CHRIST, who ceased not to invite all Sinners to Repentance; or to promise good things to the Penitent, even

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when he who knew the hearts of all men, knew that many of them to whom he Preach'd, would never repent, nor become capable of the good things promised. God hath bidden us exhort to Repentance; but he hath not told us, That we are to cease from exhorting any one that will hear us, so long as he liveth. We cannot therefore excuse our selves, if we do not all we can to render them who will not repent, *inexcusable*; it will not be safe for us to leave them this Plea, That they wanted any *Means or Helps* at any time, that we could afford them.

Thirdly, We hold on to *exhort*, even to the last, because how near unto Death soever the Sinner may seem to be, we know that the Lord of Life and Death can raise him up again; and we know not but he may do so, and let him live yet longer, to compleat the Repentance which may now be *begun*. God is pleased sometimes by severe *Chastisements*, and heavy *Afflictions*, to awake Sinners to Repentance, who had lived in sin *securely* many years; and now when the Sinner seeth himself at the *Pit's brink*, and *Hell* opening its mouth to swallow him up, he may possibly think it fit to hearken to *counsels of safety*; though no more can be said, but *possibly he may yet be saved*. We know not, but now he may enter upon a Repentance, which though it would do him no good, should he now dye, may prove unto *Salvation*, if he recover, and live to bring forth the fruits of it; which God is yet able to make him do, and hath not told us that he will not do.

Lastly,

Lastly, We to the very *last* exhort to Repentance, and mind dying Sinners of the *Promises* of God to *Penitents*; because that whether it will then avail to Salvation, or no, yet we are sure enough it can do them no hurt. It is certainly *their* duty to *repent*, and ours to *exhort* them to it; and as it would hurt us to neglect our duty, so can it not hurt them to be minded of theirs: For sinners to be made *sensible* of their sins, and of this *aggravation* of them, That they have *despised* the *Comforts* and *Promises* of Mercy to the Penitent, is a good thing, whatever the end may be of such sinners. God is glorified by mens being brought to a *sense* and *acknowledgment* of his *Authority* and *Goodness*, and of their own *Wickedness* and *Baseness*, by their *confessing*, That in all that is brought upon them, *he is righteous*, and *they are wicked*. By mens *acknowledging* at last, That God hath been always *good*, especially in his great *Patience* and *long forbearance* hitherto; and that he is now very *just* in his *Punishments*, for our obstinacy, *glory* is given to God. And this ought to be done; and if this will not qualify sinners for *Pardon* and *Salvation*, 'tis however a part of their *duty*, and may, for ought we know, *mitigate* the *Severity* of their Sentence, and *lessen* their Torments.

But now after this is said, it is a very sad thing, that men should by *wilful delays* bring themselves into this *uncomfortable* condition. And it is a very *afflicting* thing to every good Minister of Christ, to stand by the bed-side of those dying

persons to whom he is able to speak no more *Comfort* than all this amounts to. For *first*, He can speak no *Comfort* at all to the sick person, but upon *supposition* that he is, what he finds too much cause to fear he is not, a *sincere Penitent*; and this is very sad. And *secondly*, He can speak no *Comfort*, but on supposition of such a Repentance as the *sick person* himself cannot know, (without some *extraordinary* means) that he now hath; and therefore cannot tell how to *apply* the *Comfort* to himself. And this is very sad again. The *Sincerity* of ones *Repentance* cannot *ordinarily* be known to himself, but by the *fruits* of it in a *holy Life*; and by these, he that's now *dying*, can never know it. It is only such a Repentance as would produce *Holiness of Life*, if the sick person should recover, that is *Repentance to Salvation*; and when the sinner on his Death-bed calls to mind how often his heart hath in this point *deceiv'd* him; when he remembers how his *love to sin* hath hitherto *conquer'd* all such *Purposes* and *Resolutions* of holy living; how often he hath heretofore upon the same, or some other *occasion*, very *seriously* (as he thought) *resolved*, as now he doth, and yet never kept his *Resolution*; how shall he be able to assure himself, that he would keep it any better now, should he yet live?

I hope what hath been already said is abundantly enough to convince us all, both that a sinner can never repent too soon, and that he may drive it off till it be too late. And there-
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fore seeing Repentance is altogether necessary to Salvation, it is a work that requires great *Haste*, and admits of no *Delay*.

The CONCLUSION.

FROM what we have now proved, it may be too easie, I fear, for many of us to reflect very sadly upon our selves. It is certainly, if these things be so as hath been said, high time for us all to think what we have been doing all the while we have already lived in the world, that we may know what we have yet to do before we go out of it. 'Tis high time for us to remember, That we *must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done, in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad, 2 Cor. V. 10.* We *must* appear, that's certain, there is no flinching or evasion; all of us, without exception; and there will God *render to every man according to his deeds, Rom. II. 6.* When we call this to mind, do we not think our selves concern'd to enquire, How we are prepared to answer for our selves at that most dreadful Tribunal? We see, that according to our deeds or behaviour in the body, or whilst we here live, so we must then be doom'd to receive, either Eternal Reward, or Eternal Punishment; as is elsewhere plain enough. Are we able to plead for our selves, that we have lived

a life of *Repentance, Faith, and new Obedience*? Then all will be well; through the *rich Mercy* of God, and *Merits* of our *Blessed JESUS*, *Eternal Life* is assured unto us. But if we cannot plead this, what will become of us? know we how soon we must dye, or how we must dye? As we dye, so must we rise to the *Judgment*. If we dye before we have lived a *life of holiness*, our deeds have been *wicked*, and according to them we shall receive *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish*; this is the reward of all that *do evil*. Will it excuse us to say, Lord, we have lived wickedly, 'tis true, but we were *sorry* for it when we saw our selves like to dye, and *resolved* to live a better life if thou wouldst have spared us a while longer? Or will it suffice us to say, Lord, we were always *resolved* to *repent* and to *live well*, but thou didst cut us off by death before we had *begun* to do as we had *resolved*, if thou wouldst have let us live long enough? Alas, enough hath been already said, to convince us of the folly of pleading thus; and it concerns us to grow wiser very quickly, for we know not how little time we have to learn *Wisdom* in. We can many of us say already, That our *Glass* is almost run out; and he whose *Glass* is but newly turn'd up, doth not know how few *Sands* are yet to run, e'er it stop for ever. We that grow old, know, that if we have not repented, it's more than full time for us to begin; for begin now as soon as we will, we are sure it is very *late*; and a *late Repentance* is

is a very *uncertain* thing to trust to. If we have not by so long a *delay*, lost our *Salvation*, it may be fear'd we have quite lost the *Comfort* of being *sure* of it as long as we live. They who are young cannot but know, that every day they live, they grow older; what any day adds to the time past, so much it takes from the time to come; and the more they have lived, the less they have to live; and they are always ignorant whether they have a day more to live or no. If then the young person have not yet repented, 'tis high time for him too, now to begin. If he stay any longer, his Repentance will be late too, and so much the less *comfortable*; and possibly it may be *too late*; for it is ten to one he shall dye before he be old; and if not, why should he grudge himself the best of *Comforts* in *Old Age*, a *Conscience* that can testify that he hath repented, and kept God's Commandments from his youth up till then? I doubt not, but whether we be old or young, we are so well satisfied, at least many of us, that Repentance is necessary to Salvation, that we would not willingly dye without it. And we could not be so easy within our selves as we are, did we not either think our selves already penitent, or presume we shall be so sometime ere we go hence. I shall therefore now close this Discourse with a necessary *Caution*, lest we mistake that for Repentance, which is not; and an earnest *Exhortation* to make more haste to repent.

1. Let us take heed that we be not mistaken in this great and necessary duty. A mistake in a matter of so great importance, is very dangerous, and, I fear, as *common*, as *dangerous*. Corrupt Nature is so averse from it, that it easily persuades us to take something that looks a little like it, for it, because we find it more easy, and not wholly inconsistent with our sin. And hence it comes to pass, that we never repent to purpose, because we persuade our selves we have done so when we have not. We are *sensible* that we are guilty of many sins; and who is not so, that believes what he reads in Scripture? Can a *Drunkard*, or a *Sweater*, or a *Fornicator*, or *Adulterer*, or any *Prophane* and *Debauch'd* person chuse but be sensible that he breaks the Laws of God, which there he reads? We are sometimes a little *troubled* in our minds for such sins, and are *sorry* that we have been guilty of them, and this moves us to fall down on our knees, and *confess* them to God, and to *beg* his *Pardon* for them, and to *promise* we will no more commit them; And it may be, we are then in good *earnest*, and *seriously* purpose to perform our *Promises*, and we receive the *Sacrament* upon it, and so *seal up* our *Repentance*; and so our hearts are at rest, and we conclude our *Peace* is made; and by this *hasty* Conclusion, we leave the most considerable part of the work undone; and we grow too soon *confident*, ever to be *sure*; and *presume* so quickly That our condition is good, that we never use *Diligence* enough to make it good. He that
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thinks his Repentance quite finish'd, so long as he lives, is deceiv'd: It is the work of our life, and is not finish'd but with it: Whenever it was begun, it must continue till we die: And it implies all this that here follows, which seems to be too little thought on by many who think themselves true Penitents.

First, There must be a very serious resolution to live a Godly Life, after the Commandments of God: And such a resolution supposeth a due Consideration of such things as are the proper motives to it. A man must consider the Nature of God, and his own nature as he is man, made in the Image of God; whence it became his natural duty to continue Holy as God is Holy. He must consider God's Absolute Authority over him as his Creator, Owner, Governour and Preserver; and the natural obligations that are upon him as God's Creature, to Serve and Honour him according to his will. He must consider that the design of his Creation was, that God might Glorify his own Goodness in making him a Creature capable of understanding so much of God as might enable him to Glorify God on Earth, and be perfectly Blessed in the enjoyment of God for ever. All this must make him sensible both how vile and degenerate, how unworthy and wretched, how filthy and how miserable Sinning against God hath made him: And how being fallen from his Holiness and Obedience, so long as he continues in this Sinful state, he can have no hope ever to be Happy, but

but must lie under the *Wrath* of God: and unless he be *renewed* unto Holiness, the *Curse* which God laid on Sinners, which is that of *Eternal Torments*, must needs fall upon him. He must consider the admirable *Love* of God in sending him in this his Sinful and Miserable State, a *Saviour* to redeem him from destruction by the *Sacrifice* of his own most *Precious Blood*; and to invite him by his *Gospel* to *Repentance* and *Faith*, and to *promise* him the assistance of his *Holy Spirit* of *Grace* to restore him to Holiness, and to fit him for the benefits of Redemption; the *Pardon* of his Sins, and *Eternal Happiness* with God in his kingdom of Glory. Such considerations as these must beget in us a *deep* and *humble sense* of our *vileness* and *wretchedness*; a *godly sorrow* for behaving our selves so unworthily towards God, sinking much below the dignity which he gave us; a *holy Shame* and *indignation* against our selves for this; a *judging* and *condemning* our selves as worthy to perish, and to be punished everlastingly; and a most earnest *desire* of God's Mercy and Favour; a firm *belief* of all that he hath already done for us in *Christ*; fervent *Prayer* for the renewing and sanctifying Grace of the Holy Ghost, to qualify us for a *full Pardon*, and *eternal Salvation*: And *lastly*, an unfeigned *resolution* to endeavour henceforward to *mortify* all our *lusts*, to *resist* all *temptations* to Sin, to *use* all the *means* of Holiness, to Serve God according to the rules of the *Gospel*; and so doing,

ing, to cast our selves upon the *Mercy* of God through the *merits* of our Blessed Saviour. Now all this is but our *first entrance* into a *State of Repentance*, which is also the only *State of Salvation* on Earth. This is that which qualificth persons of ripe age for *Baptism*; and this is that which *Baptized Infants* are obliged to by *Baptism* as soon as they come to years of understanding. And this, tho but the *beginning* of a *Penitent Life*, is enough for those who live no longer: And implieth in it a great deal, too little thought on by many. As *first*, A *change of mind and judgment*; our understanding being so far enlightened, that we judge otherwise of *God* and *our selves*, of *Heaven* and *Earth*, of *Good* and *Evil*, than we did before. We *prize* and *value* *God*, and *Heaven*, and *Holiness* above all things whatsoever, even life it self: And we cannot think well of our selves, nor value any thing in the World without these. *Secondly*, Such a *change of desire and will*, that all our desire is to please and honour God, and by that means to be restored to, and continue in his favour; and not to please our selves in any thing wherewith we know God is displeased. Our *wills* are resolved to consult no longer with *Flesh* and *Blood*, nor to be guided by our own corrupt inclinations and judgment, but wholly by the will of God, the Gospel of *JESUS* Christ, and the *Grace* of the Holy Spirit. *Thirdly*, Such a *change of life and endeavour*, that just now we set our selves in good earnest
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on the great work, daily mortifying and crucifying the Flesh with its corrupt affections and lusts, and cleansing our selves from all filthiness of Flesh and Spirit, perfecting Holiness in the Fear of the Lord. This is the first *beginning of Repentance*; and if we have not done this, whatever we flatteringly think of our selves, we have it all yet to begin. And yet is this, I fear, a great deal more than many who have a long time pleas'd themselves with a conceit that they are *Sincere Penitents*, have at any time yet well thought on.

Secondly, After this unfeigned resolution to live a Godly life, there must be a *constant care upon our Souls to make good this resolution*, and to carry on this change, thus happily begun, unto perfection. We must enter upon an habitual course of governing our Thoughts, Words and Actions, by the Word of God; of denying our selves in all the vile desires, sinful inclinations and lustings of corrupt Nature; and of using all fit means of subduing the Flesh unto the Spirit, and of growing in Grace and in the knowledge of our Lord JESUS CHRIST. And here again is much more than is, I fear, by all of us well thought on. As *First*, A constant *fixing our thoughts upon God* as much as we can, as always *present* with us, seeing and observing our whole behaviour; an *Eye* in all things to his Will and Commandments; being careful to leave nothing undone that he hath enjoined us, to do nothing that he hath forbidden; to observe

serve the prescribed method and manner of doing every duty, as being always under his eye. *Secondly*, A very *diligent* and *frequent* searching into, and *reviewing* of all these things; observing narrowly what has been defective or amiss any way, that we may be duly humbled, and all may be for the future amended. *Thirdly*, A constant *watching* and *standing upon our guard against all Temptations*, whereby we may be drawn to commit evil, or neglect the good which is our duty, or to be slight and careless in the doing of it. *Lastly*, A daily *using of the helps of reading, hearing, meditating, praying, conversing with pious company*, or whatever may be a means of preserving our hearts in a *Penitent* and *holy* temper, and of increasing our love to God and Holiness, and our hatred of Sin. He that is not careful to do this as well as he can, is far from true Repentance.

Lastly, After all our utmost care, because of the weakness of our Nature, through incogitancy, and surprize, and a multitude of unavoidable business of this life, we shall find, that in many things we offend all. And therefore we must often *examine our selves*, and discovering our failings as well as we can, we are still as we discover them, to *repent* of them; and concluding with our selves, that many of them may have slipped away, and escaped our observation, we are, together with those we have found out, to pray for the pardon of our *secret Faults*. And here *first*, The *sense* of our numerous

merous Infirmities must make us continually more and more *humble* and *vile* in our own eyes, and take down all that confidence we are too apt to have of our selves, more and more convince us of the necessity of grace, and send us to God to implore, in the most humble and fervent manner, his strength in our weakness. And *secondly*, We ought to give glory to God in humbling our selves *before the World*; and confessing by our *whole behaviour*, that we esteem of our selves as vile Sinners, unworthy of God's Blessings, and such as think it becomes us to humble our selves to all whom we have offended, to make them all the satisfaction we can, to ask them forgiveness, and beg their Prayers to God for his forgiveness of us.

All this is necessarily implied in the Duty of Repentance. And how easy is it then to see, that many who think themselves Penitents, are mistaken in their duty? Yea, how many of them who seem to be Persons not of the worst temper, but far better than the most of us are, never repent at all, merely because they never yet well consider'd what Repentance is. It is no less than hath been said; So that no one that hath not well *considered*, and unfeignedly *resolved*, and is not always *careful* to avoid Sin, and lead a holy life; no one that *lovet*h not God more than all things, or that *hateth* not Sin more than all Evils; no one that is not more *desirous* to honour God, than to please himself; none that *examines* not his own heart and his ways

ways often, or that *studieth* not the Word of God constantly, or *shuns* not all Temptations carefully, or *resists* them not stoutly; none that is *proud* of himself, or is not *deeply* and *humbly* sensible of his own vileness; none that *continueth* in any *known* sin, or *wilfully* and *ordinarily* omitteth any known duty; none, I say, that labours not as much as he can to be a *good Christian* in all things according to the Gospel of Christ, is to account himself a true Penitent.

2. And now, if we find not our selves true Penitents; yet let us, as we value God's Honour, and our own Salvation, *make haste* to be so. Oh what a wretched piece of folly is it to cast our whole happiness upon a mere uncertainty! What an unaccountable madness is it, instead of making our Calling and Election sure, to make them every day we live more and more uncertain to us? Is this all the kindness that we can afford our selves, that we will rather venture to be miserable for ever, than take a little pains in time to prevent it? Had we rather weep fruitlessly for our Torments, than weep savingly for our Sins? For a little brutish Pleasure, which though we have to day, we are not sure we shall have to morrow, shall we hazard the unexpressible Pleasures of Eternity, which we may make sure of to day, but make it a very doubtful point, if we delay to make sure of them to day, whether we shall ever enjoy them, do what we can hereafter? Do we any of us know, how soon the Door will be shut
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upon us, and there shall be no entrance for us into Heaven? Why then will we imitate the *foolish Virgins*, and rather chuse to *sleep* away the opportunity, than seek to have our *Lamps* furnish'd with *Oil* in due season? If we be taken unprovided, we know it will be in vain at last to cry, *Lord, Lord, open unto us*; Christ's Answer will be ready, *Verily I say unto you, I know you not*, Matth. XXV. 12. Those who have worn the Devil's Livery so long, Christ will not own at last for Persons of his Retinue.

O why will we deal worse with God, and our own Souls, than we are wont to do with any thing else of the meanest concern to us? When we are in any trouble of body or estate, we are in great haste to be relieved; neither delay we to accept of help when 'tis first tendered to us. When any one offers us a good gift, or other considerable kindness, we are not wont to bid him stay till to morrow. What an untoward humour is this in us? God made haste to restore fallen Man, and to comfort him with the promise of a *Saviour*; Our *Saviour* made haste when the time was come to shed his precious Blood for our Redemption; The *Holy Ghost* hath not delay'd by the *Word* and *Ministry* to beseech us to be reconciled to God. But we delay still, as though, whatever else be, yet nothing that is meant to bring us towards *Heaven* and *Happiness* were worth regarding.

Whilst we delay our Repentance, we give the *Devil*, our *Adversary*, all the *Advantages* he can desire

desire to have of us. The holy Angels of God would rejoyce to see one of us repent, *Luke XV. 7, 10.* And had we rather gratify the Devil by our Damnation, than have the holy Angels rejoyce at our Salvation? Whilst we delay, the Devil needs not tempt us, nor seek to devour us; we take care to save him that labour, by wilfully continuing in his power; and if hereafter we shall think of repenting, we have already taken care that he shall not want matter for a temptation from our long impenitence. Yea, we give him so sure hold of us, that we shall not easily break loose from him. We have given him so long experience of our yielding-temper, that he is never to seek how to fit our humour with a suitable Temptation; neither can he doubt of always prevailing, where he hath prevail'd so often. Hitherto he hath befool'd us, by persuading us 'tis always too soon to grow wise; and having been fools so long, he will the more easily persuade us hereafter, because with a fairer colour of reason, that it is then too late.

How many of our temper hath the Devil got into Hell already, by persuading them 'tis already too soon, till they find it too late? What would those miserable Souls, who have been thus befool'd into Torments, now give, if they had it, for such an opportunity of repenting as we now have? O why then should we now lose the opportunity we have, and giddily venture thereby suddenly to fall into that remediless condition they are now in? The next day, or hour, for ought we know, may lodge us for ever with them

in Hell; and then shall we have weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth for evermore. Those tears of Repentance, which will not then quench, might now prevent those unquenchable Flames from taking hold of us.

O that we could every day really imagine our selves just under the stroke of Death! and that the apprehensions thereof might awake us into a serious consideration of that Eternal State we then must enter into! What haste would we then be in to make as sure as we could of escaping those dreadful Torments, the very thoughts whereof seem torment enough? What strange Agonies of Soul have many dying sinners fallen into, who have lived jovially all their days? What thoughts have some of us, it may be, had, when in some fit of sickness we apprehended Death approaching near us? How penitent, how religious seem'd we then to grow all on a sudden! How came we to be of such a different temper then, from that which we were in before? O, we saw our selves, in all appearance, then just on the very brink of Eternity; we thought our selves just stepping into Hell, if we repented not; and then we thought it time to repent indeed, and that it stood us upon as much as our Souls were worth to make haste. And may we not be this moment, for ought we know, in the very same danger that we then thought our selves in? Do we know, any of us, that there is so much as one day, or one hour, betwixt this moment and Eternity? And why then are we not now in as great haste to repent, as we were in then? How many
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that delay from time to time, are, when they least fear it, knock'd down with a sudden blow? How many are cut off in the very act of sin, when secure in themselves, and thinking on no such thing as dying, they were in Hell before they thought that death was near them? Is not our delaying our Repentance the likeliest way in the World to provoke Almighty God to send out one of these swift Arrows to destroy us? O let us be ready, for it may come in an hour that we think not. Whilst we so confidently promise our selves to morrow, and flatter our selves with purposes of repenting then, a sudden destruction, a Phrenzy, a stupidity, or we know not what, may arrest us, and not give us leave so much as to think that we are Sinners; or to say, Lord have mercy on us.

Doth not God seem, for this very reason, to conceal both the *time*, and the *manner* of our death from us, that we may be the more *watchful*, and take the more care to be always ready for dying at whatever *hour*, or in whatever *way* it shall please him to take us hence? Did we certainly know before-hand; just *when*, and *how* we must die, we would venture the more boldly to spend our time in sin and vanity, till we knew the time was near; and then it may be some few days before, become a little more serious; just as it is the custom of too many at this time to do before a Sacrament. Therefore God will not have us to know the time of our death, that we not knowing but it may be to morrow, may be every day ready; and so he may have

the *honour*, and we the *comfort* of a pious life.

Moreover, as was before said, To continue in sin, in hopes that we may repent hereafter, as it is to *sin that grace may abound*, which is a thing (if we believe the *Apostle*) greatly to be abhorred, *Rom. VI. 1.* So it is the most effectual course we can take to shorten our days, and to prevent the benefit we hope for. *The fear of the Lord prolongeth days; but the years of the wicked shall be shortened: The hope of the righteous shall be gladness, but the expectation of the wicked shall perish, Prov. X. 27, 28.*

Again, We can hardly give any rational account, why God should so strictly, and under so severe Penalties enjoin us the practice of many excellent Vertues, and forbid us many foul Sins, if we may hope to please him, and be saved by a very late, or death-bed Repentance. Can such Vertues as *Sobriety, Temperance and Chastity*, and many more, be thought commanded us as the proper Exercises of a *sick and dying man*? Can the Sins of *Gluttony and Drunkenness, Chambering and Wantonness, Murther, Theft, Ambition, Covetousness*, and more such like, be forbidden upon pain of damnation, lest a man should be guilty of them on his *Death-bed*, or in his last *Sickness*; when 'tis somewhat hard to conceive how a man should have any thoughts of them? Or can we conceive, that the meaning of such Commands is no more but this; You must either do these Duties, and avoid these Sins, while you live, or repent that you have not done so, when you are about to die? What were this but to say, That all the Com-
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mands of *holy living* signify no more, but this, That a man may safely break them all whilst he liveth, if he can but keep them, when he can break them no more; or be sorry that he hath broken them, when he is afraid he is just going to be damn'd for it; or resolve to keep them, when he thinks he can live no longer?

What probability is there, that any *Resolution* of repenting hereafter, is sincere? We cannot *absolutely resolve* to repent hereafter, because we cannot certainly know that we shall live hereafter; and if we resolve but *conditionally*, to repent hereafter, that is, on supposition that we shall live to repent, we must seem content to be damn'd, if we dye before that time come, because we know, That without Repentance we must be damn'd. I think one cannot in good earnest resolve to repent, unless he immediately do repent when he resolves upon it. How can any one imagine it too soon to do what he knows necessary to be done, and yet may never be done, if not just now; No man can with any colour of reason be thought in earnest, when he saith he resolveth to do that another day, which he knows is to be done every day, and must of necessity be done sometime, and yet he knows not whether he shall have another day or no. It's plain such a man doth not resolve at all to repent, for he loves it not, and that's the reason he doth it not now, and will still be as good a reason not to do it then; but in truth, all he resolves upon, is, not to repent now, or to drive it off yet longer, and that's no resolution at all to repent.

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What folly is it to drive off our Repentance, till we be scourged and lash'd unto it? If we make not haste of our selves, and God have yet any kindness left in store for us, he will whip us to it. If we will not otherwise awake out of sleep, God, if he have not already determin'd we shall sleep on unto death, will awake us with his Rod. And whether had the *Prodigal* better have staid in his Father's House, and continued in his Love, and under his constant Care and Providence, by obeying him at first; or have wandred abroad, as he did, till extreme want and ill usage drove him home? If we will be saved, we must repent; and is it not a very foolish thing to stay till the whip drive us to it? Especially when 'tis doubtful, whether or no the Repentance which begins in *Fear*, will end in *Love*, which yet if it do not, it will never bring us to Salvation.

And now after all this, I hope none will be so foolish as to flatter themselves with a vain conceit of their being *Penitents*, when they are not; or to encourage themselves with as vain hopes of repenting hereafter, whereof they can have no certainty. We find indeed *one* Example of a dying Penitent in the *Scripture*, who was accepted of God, and we find no more but one, that of the *Thief* upon the Cross. But alas! he hath afforded but very small Encouragement to any delaying Sinner, by his own happiness in being crucified by the side of his Saviour. Here is, as I said, but one single Example, and yet had there been ten thousand such as this one was, I do not see how they could any more encourage a considering man to delay

delay his Repentance one hour, because no one knows whether after that hour he shall have so much time as that Malefactor had to Repent in, tho it was very short, or whether in that short time he shall repent as he did. Had never any Offender but one, been pardon'd by any King, could this be any reasonable encouragement to all the Rebels and Malefactors in the Countrey to hold on rebelling, robbing, stealing, murthuring, and committing all sorts of capital Crimes in hopes of a Pardon; only because once it fell out that some such Offender, was pardon'd? Indeed it will follow hence, that such a Pardon may *possibly* be obtain'd, because it was obtain'd: but it follows not that it may *ordinarily* or *probably* be obtain'd, because it never was any more than once obtain'd, that we know of. Besides, This is indeed an Example of a *late Repentance*; and many Examples of a late Repentance there are besides this, tho hardly another of one so late: but we are not sure it is an Example of a *delayed Repentance*; for we cannot find that this late Penitent ever one minute delayed his Repentance after he was called to it, and convinced that it was his duty. And indeed seeing this man's case was very extraordinary, he that would encourage himself by it, ought first to see that his own Case, in all considerable circumstances, be like unto it.

If any one ask, What course is to be taken by those who have long delay'd their Repentance, but are not yet in appearance near unto death? I know not what better Advice to give him than this: That he delay it no longer, but make all
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the haste that possibly he can to repent now: And by how much the more time he hath already lost, let him use so much the more care and diligence to improve that little which is yet behind, to his best advantage. Such an one had need to give himself, in a manner, wholly henceforward to this great Work, and should not suffer any business that he can well shun, to disturb him in it. He should not now grudge to pinch himself of time in relation to all bodily and worldly Concerns, as much as he did God and his own Soul before; or to bestow as much upon these, if he can possibly, as he used to do upon those. No self-examination, no humiliation, no prayers, no tears, no striving to do good, can be too much. He had need to do almost nothing else but bewail his sinful life, denying himself all the Pleasures, and all the Comforts of this World, save only the necessary supports of life. This seems to me the least he can do, to satisfy himself of the sincerity of so late a Repentance, or to lay a foundation for a comfortable hope of God's acceptance. I shall now conclude the whole Discourse with those words, *Isa. LV. 6, 7. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

